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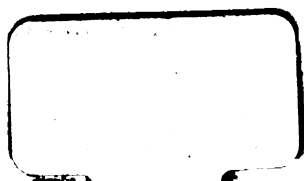
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# *Gayle Langford*

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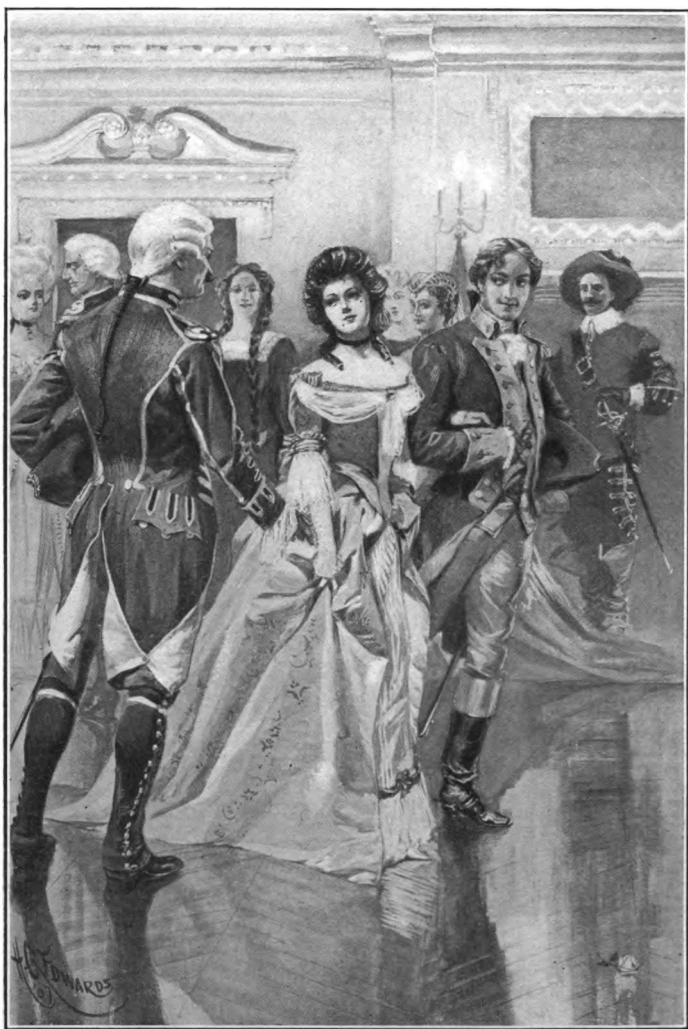
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**GAYLE LANGFORD**

West Hoboken  
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**"YOUR HIGHNESS FORGETS HIMSELF!" SHE SAID, SHARPLY.**  
*Page 47.*

# GAYLE LANGFORD

BEING THE ROMANCE OF A TORY BELLE  
AND A PATRIOT CAPTAIN

BY

HAROLD MORTON KRAMER

AUTHOR OF "HEARTS AND THE CROSS"

*ILLUSTRATED BY H. C. EDWARDS*



BOSTON  
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.



KD 8900



Published, August, 1907

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GAYLE LANGFORD

**Norwood Press**  
Berwick & Smith Co.  
Norwood, Mass., U. S. A.

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# GAYLE LANGFORD

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## CHAPTER I

“AS THE TWIG IS BENT —”

**A**S I sit now in the cheerful glow of the blazing backlog it seems that memory was born to me amid the terrors of that evil night — well, longer ago than I like to acknowledge, for though gray locks and faltering limbs be not a disgrace, yet would I fain hug to my heart the pleasing delusion that Youth still lingers near me.

True, I note an increasing affection for pipe and ale-mug and the dreamy, reminiscential comfort of the backlog's ruddy offering, but even in such moments I feel the years slipping from my shoulders, and oft do I return from this mental visit to bygones and find myself, sword in hand, in the centre of the room, lunging,

parrying, the blade flashing with the old fiery gleam in the candle-light, my wrist supple and strong, my feet sure and shifty. And then, the blade once more hung in its honored niche, I sigh at the age of memory.

But, in truth, no mother has a more God-given, pain-racked right to hug to her bosom her first-born than I have to love and cherish and coddle in the firelight's glow this precious phenomenon, memory, for the travails of its birth left their stamp upon me — here, this jagged scar but illy concealed by my forelock, which I have worn low since that night as a matter of concealment, for I confess to the weakness of a pride in personal appearances. Some boasting Othello might take pride in the display of such a souvenir of blood and woe, but I prefer it to remain unseen. Perhaps when I lie in my coffin the minister may tenderly brush back these whitened locks and point to this mutilated forehead in preaching to those assembled the doctrine of thankfulness and praise to Almighty God for the blessings of peace they enjoy, the survey of which should lead them closer to that Just One whose care and mercy have been manifested to me these many times. And if it be true that on occasions, in the blackness of despair, I wondered if Jehovah yet

reigned, surely I may be forgiven, for did not even the Son, in the bitterness of crucifixion, cry out from the Cross, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

'Twas a night in the year 1764 to which I referred in the beginning, and I live again the whole dreadful affair; I hear the swirling of angry waters, the creaking of masts and spars, the flapping of sails, the shouts of maddened men, and the booming of cannon. I see the lightning's vivid flashing, terrible, but less frequent than the flashing of firearms, and then —

But I had as well explain it all to you while the mood is with me.

My father, John MacDonald Lester, was a merchant in the city of Boston, and I know now, though I was too young to know then, that during the years of my babyhood he was wealthy. His schooners plied between that city and the West Indies, and his trade in molasses, sugar, wines, and spices thrived for a season. But in 1760 George Third ascended the throne of England, and conditions in the Colonies rapidly passed from bad to worse.

He quickly surrounded himself with advisers whose conceptions of right, justice, and liberty were as dwarfish as his own. Under such con-



ditions trade stagnated, wealth stole away from the homes where it had snuggled, and the business of John MacDonald Lester was no exception. Month by month disaster clawed at my father's affairs, and I recall now that in the evenings when my gentle mother would sing me to sleep my drowsy lids would often fly open with a suddenness that revealed to me truant tears escaping from her eyes. What it all meant I knew not then, but I know now, and I, myself, feel the agony of mind that must have been the portion of my parents during those gloomy days.

Finally my father's fleet of schooners was reduced to one, the *Eagle*, and it was on this vessel that he embarked that June day, 1764, for a trading voyage. I was past twelve years of age then and it was decided that I was to accompany him, both as a matter of company to my father and in the belief that the voyage would bring to my cheeks once more the color that some childish ailment had stolen. Of that voyage but little need be said. Let it be summed in the statement that for weeks we cruised about from port to port, loading with molasses, wines, sugars, and other goods, the whole being a matter of never-ending delight to me.

It was on the return voyage that life became

real to me. We were within but little more than a day's sail of Boston, and my father, who had neglected me for the last twenty-four hours and had devoted himself to a nervous pacing, back and forth, back and forth, of the deck, suddenly called me to his side.

"Ian," he said (My name was bestowed in honor of my rugged Scotch grandfather), "are you brave?"

I remember that I stared at him, my eyes widening with wonderment. Then it occurred to me that he was but giving me a test, so I said, "Yes," without further thought.

"Then keep your courage warm, for this night it will be required of you," he replied, and to my surprise there was no smile in the taut-drawn muscles of his mouth.

He looked me full in the face a moment, and then with one hand on my shoulder he pointed off to leeward.

"Yonder," he said, "lies your country, America. It is the land of your birth, the land where you have a right under God to pursue happiness, and in manhood provide for those you love. No king has God's sanction to rob you of your rights. I tell you this in order that you may understand my motives in what is to come.

King George has crushed our people until poverty is before me. By the enforcement of his Importation Act, I will be required to pay such exorbitant duties on this cargo that but little will be left me. My business has been so wrecked that I find that nothing will separate my family from want if the King's officers get their hands on this cargo."

He tramped away a short distance, and then turned once more to me.

"Ian," he said, and his voice had in it a quality of harshness I had never heard there before. "I intend landing this cargo without paying duty."

During the balance of that day and night, and much of the next day, we beat about, slowly approaching the coast, intending to make a dash for an inlet not far from Boston when darkness should come. To me my father explained the danger of detection and death from the royal sloops of war that were constantly patrolling the coast, for he had determined not to surrender. The crew loyally swore to die at their posts rather than yield, for even then the spirit of liberty and resistance to the King was burning in most American breasts.

As darkness came on the clouds began banking

on the horizon, and as the last ray of daylight faded, a tinge of copper spread over the clouds. "A nasty night for the job, sir," said our sailing-master, but father only nodded and continued leaning on the rail and gazing at the dreary waste of sea and sky. The muttering of thunder stole to us soon, and the wind began a dirge in the rigging, but the hand on the helm never faltered, and straight for the coast we sped. A torrent of rain fell upon us and the gale suddenly freshened, so that it became necessary to take in a part of our sail, but even with the small spread that was left, the *Eagle* lurched and creaked and shuddered in the grasp of the storm. And so the night came on.

It was near midnight, and I stood on deck clinging to a stanchion, a rope about my waist, watching the struggle with the sea. Suddenly a light appeared to spring up out of the waters some distance away on our starboard bow. We were running without lights, and though my father and the sailing-master held a hurried consultation regarding the vessel that had so suddenly manifested its presence, it was determined to hold on our course. Half an hour passed, and then the storm seemed to gather all its electric forces into one awful blaze of lightning;

the heavens were set afire and the sea was lighted up as though the sun had by a miracle burst through from the other side of the world.

Those who were abroad on that desert of water stood revealed to each other. To our straining eyes was revealed a British sloop-of-war, probably mounting ten or twelve guns, pitching along about half a mile distant from us and headed toward us, though probably by accident, for it was impossible that they had discovered us before that moment. But now —

My father shrieked to the sailing-master; he in turn howled sharp orders to the crew, and I saw them crawling out on the yards, trimming sails, while the wind tore at them and sought to drag them to death. Every son aboard knew that nothing remained for us now but flight and a trust in God that we might elude the war-ship in the darkness and storm. That they had seen us we knew, and that they would divine our purpose of unlawfully landing a cargo there was no doubt. Schooners did not sail without lights in those parts for other purposes. Scarcely a minute passed until a rocket burned its way from the sloop's deck into the night, followed almost instantly by another of different hue, a command for us to halt and give an account of ourselves,

our sailing-master said. A moment later and we had come about, the schooner staggering like a drunken man, and were speeding away. Again the rockets, and no response; then another illumination from the sky and they saw our stern towards them.

Hardly had the lightning died away until a flash sprang from the sloop's bow, and the roar of a cannon sounded, but we saw nothing of the ball. Perhaps it was a blank shot, but I have never been able so to persuade myself. In truth, the royal officers were too fond of "shooting loyalty to the King" into the Colonists for them ever to waste powder in blank shots. Away we sailed, the roaring of the cannon behind us blanching many tanned cheeks, for we were practically helpless in a fight, having no arms but a few muskets and a dozen cutlasses. But the darkness and the plunging of the vessels saved us from harm during the first few hours of the race, though once a cannon-ball skimmed our lee rail and splintered it. But presently the gray of dawn began stealing over the sea, and as I once more left the cabin, whither my father had forced me to seek refuge, I found him standing by the wheel, though I scarcely knew him at first sight, so haggard his face, so deep-set his eyes, and so

aged had he become in the night. He looked at me, and by the feeble flicker of the binnacle light I saw tears in his eyes.

"Are you still brave, Ian?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered, conscious that now I was become either his weakness or his strength, as I chose.

"God bless you, my son," he responded, and embraced me. "If you live, remember this as your first stroke for liberty. Surrender now means prison, disgrace, poverty; persecution for your mother and all of us. We must trust to our sails."

With the approach of dawn the tempest had stilled considerably, and we were now ploughing the sea with quite a spread of canvas, while the sailing-master anxiously watched the wind, crowding to the masts every inch of sail that he dared. For some time there had been no firing from our pursuers, the uselessness of the cannonading in the dark having become apparent to the sloop's commander, but now as the pall of darkness began to lift, pursuer and pursued became visible, white-winged iotas on a seemingly limitless expanse of tossing waves. From their masthead the ensign of his Majesty's navy was fluttering in the gale; from our masthead —

nothing but a ribbon of canvas, torn by the night's storm, washed to its original whiteness by the torrents of rain, and now fluttering its bleached and torn shape in the winds of heaven as though proclaiming the spotlessness of Liberty's principle, and the rending storms through which it could and would pass and yet exist.

Words were few on our deck. Every man had his duty, and no time for aught else! Spurts of smoke and flame began belching from the war-sloop's bow, and solid shot came skipping across the waves; and as we watched, our only topsail was carried away, greatly reducing our speed. Preparations for spreading another were hurried, but the sloop had gotten our range, and in a few minutes a shot plumped through the vessel just above the water-line, and another sent our boom flying into the sea. At the same time our steering-gear fouled, and the *Eagle* lay floundering, helpless, in the sea. The next shot wrecked the wheel-house and stretched the wheelsman, dying, on our deck. Our hopeless condition and the sight of the wheelsman's blood conquered my father, and he turned, sobbing, to the sailing-master and ordered a surrender. A sailor clambered half-way up the splintered mast and shook a sheet in the breeze as a token of our yielding.



The sloop was now rapidly overhauling us, and from her deck we could hear a cheer, as though the sleuths of the sea were proud of their victory over a helpless fugitive.

I stood by my father when the naval vessel came alongside and her boarding crew clambered over our splintered rail. His hand was on my arm and I felt it quiver. Looking up, I noticed that his shoulders were stooped, as though a decade had suddenly dropped upon them. The commander, a stocky-built, heavy-jowled man, pompous in his brilliant uniform, strutted forward to where we stood, his men halting a short distance back.

"So, you traitorous dogs!" he shouted, "you found yourselves no match for the King's men, eh?"

As he spoke he stopped in front of my father, his thumbs in his belt, and a malicious leer on his face. My nostrils caught the fumes of liquor.

"We have not tried to fight, sir," responded my father. "We are unarmed, else would you not come swaggering along our deck. We endeavored to protect our own by escape, but failed. That's all, sir."

"You deserve a noose at the end of a yard-arm, every son of a she cur. But we'll soon have

you in your kennels,” and he laughed uproariously, at the same time emitting a stream of tobacco juice from his mouth that would have drenched me had I not sprung aside.

I heard a low murmur from the *Eagle's* crew, drawn up near the mainmast. The night had stolen my childhood from me, and as I looked into their sullen faces I knew that but a spark was needed to fire a mine, the result of which would be tragedy. That my intuitions were not at fault was proven quickly.

“We are your prisoners, sir, and — damn me, you are drunk!” thundered my father.

The words were scarcely uttered when the officer raised his heavy fist and struck him full in the face, knocking him to the deck. Then I heard a howl of rage arise from the men of the *Eagle*. As though with one thought, they turned and seized the cutlasses and muskets which had been brought out during the early morning and stacked near the mainmast. Why the officer had not secured them when first he boarded us can only be explained by his drunken condition, which blinded him to all but his opportunity to vent his vileness on helpless men.

An instant later a shower of bullets from the *Eagle's* men and the boarding crew swept the

deck, though so hasty was the fire that but few fell. Then, led by the sailing-master, the *Eagle's* men sprang forward with cutlasses upraised, and in a trice Colonist and Briton were all desperately fighting.

I snatched up one of the heavy blades and then rushed to my father's side, but before I could reach him I saw the officer bury his sword in the unarmed man's breast. As my father fell his life-blood spurted out and stained my garments. Blinded with the horror of it all, I clutched the cutlass with both hands and swung it with all my strength. A shrill cry of pain brought me out of the frenzy for a moment and I saw the officer's sword drop, his right hand clinging to his wrist by but a strip of bloody flesh. My blade had swung true. He fell to his knees, and then, rising, staggered to the boat's side, while I whirled and dived into the hell of fighting, bleeding, dying men which now separated me from my father. God! It was awful on the deck of the *Eagle* that Sunday morning.

The struggle was to the death; no longer was the question of prisoners possible. Men fought and fell dying, and in their death agonies reached up from the mire of blood to strike a last blow. But it could not last long. The *Eagle's* men were

too few. For me it was soon over. Hardly had I plunged into the vortex of death when my blade was sent flying from my weak hand, and a glancing blow of a cutlass caught me here — here under the forelock. 'Twas a gaping, bloody wound, and the boy, Ian Lester, went down on the deck of the *Eagle* among the corpses and those who soon would be corpses. And as I rolled over in my agony of pain, I looked aloft and saw the white remnant of sail still fluttering to heaven its signal of the dawning of Liberty's struggle. Then a blur of red came before my eyes, the shrieks of men and the clashing of steel died away, and the blessing of unconsciousness was mine.

It must have been an hour later when I feebly wiped the blood from my eyes and raised myself on one elbow. The fight was over, reinforcements from the war-sloop had boarded us, and under the direction of a gray-haired officer were going about the decks, unclasping dead men from each other's embrace, laying them out in separate rows, Briton in one, American in the other, while a surgeon was busy with the wounded, and the blood was being washed from the *Eagle's* deck. Once more objects danced unsteadily before me, and I fainted.

When next I opened my eyes I found myself

lying in a strange bunk, amid strange surroundings. I put my hand to my head and found a bandage there. Then a man in the uniform of a British naval surgeon stepped to my side.

"How do you feel, my boy?" he asked, kindly.

"All right, I think, sir," I replied. "Will you tell me about what happened after I fell?"

He looked grave and serious. "I think I had better not," he said, a tinge of sadness in his tone. "Let me simply tell you that you are on his Majesty's sloop, *Oxford*, and that you have a nasty cut on your head."

"And my father?"

"His name, please."

"John MacDonald Lester, owner of the *Eagle*."

Another shadow rested on his face. "I know you have courage, for they say you fought well, so I may as well tell you that your father is dead."

I felt the hot tears gush from my eyes, and the surgeon tried in vain to check my sobs. I thought of my gentle mother, and knew that the blade which took my father's life had shortened hers, also. The surgeon gave me a quieting potion, and after awhile I fell asleep, partly from sheer weakness and weariness. Ah, boys were sturdy in those days, and the heartaches and dangers matured them quickly, making mere striplings

leaders in the affairs of men, but I think you will agree that it was no disgrace that I should lie there and sleep, even though I had not looked upon the face of my father since death had come.

It was almost sunset when I awakened. No one was near, and, though weak and dizzy, I clambered out of the bunk and made my way to the deck. The sea was calm, there being just enough breeze to keep us moving at a fair speed with all sails set. I looked astern, and there trailed the *Eagle*, a cable fastened to her bow. Rent and torn, she breasted the sea unevenly, but her white fragment of sail still flapped from the masthead.

It was near noon of the following day when we anchored in the bay at Boston, and I and the three others of the *Eagle* who still clung to life were put ashore under guard. My father's body was taken with us, and after a brief pause on the dock, I was placed between two soldiers and marched off towards prison. Behind me were borne the wounded men, and behind them the body of my father, a strong guard around us.

The news of the affair had spread, and the streets were lined to see us pass. There were jeering Loyalists, and side by side with them women who wept in sympathy with us, and

strong men who with white faces and set jaws watched the procession of woe. As we turned a corner I saw a little girl not more than seven, with freckled face and straw-colored hair, pick up a pebble and hurl it at me as she shouted, "Long live King George!" A moment later I turned and saw her burst into tears as my father's body was borne past.

A little farther on and a woman came, screaming, towards us. It was my mother. With streaming eyes and outstretched arms, she rushed towards me, but was forced away.

"Ian! Ian! Your father?" she moaned.

I could not utter a word, but turned and pointed to the silent burden in the rear. With a shriek she flung herself on the body of my father, but was seized by soldiers and thrust back. Forgetting my guards, I sprang towards her, but a blow from a musket sent me down and the next moment I was being dragged along, fighting, crying, praying, while my guards laughed at my struggles.

Of my imprisonment for a week as "an enemy dangerous to the King" I need not tell. At the end of the week I was released to attend the funeral of my mother, who had been stricken by brain fever, and after that I was taken charge

of by an uncle of my father, living in Lexington. What little of my father's property remained was confiscated to the King — and squandered by his officers.

At every opportunity during the next ten years I took fencing lessons, and my progress was a matter of pleasure to my tutors, the most proficient men with the blade to be found in the Colonies, for my great-uncle was not stingy in my education. The rupture with England was constantly widening, and I confess, though perhaps it was evil in me, that I saw with delight the Colonists preparing for war, for I longed to strike a blow against the King.

I was one of those who sprang from bed at the warning of Paul Revere that the British were marching to Concord to destroy the ammunition the Patriots had smuggled there from Boston. But history has told you how Major Pitcairn's advance found us on the Lexington common in the early morning, and though there was dismay in most Patriot hearts that day of tragedy, in my breast exultation flamed, for the first volley of the Revolution had been fired.



## CHAPTER II

“ — THE TREE IS INCLINED ”

“ CAPTAIN LESTER! ”

I looked up from the letter I had just received from my father's uncle, a letter that he had written me some three months before, and which had been following me about, up country and across country, in soldiers' saddlebags, while I was being blown hither, thither, by the fierce blast of war that was now sweeping in all its fury across the Colonies.

My great-uncle, while severe in his criticism of King George's policies, was far from warm in the cause of the Patriot armies. He was always a timid man, and this Revolution, he foresaw, would but result in the hanging of every wretched man of us who failed to die in battle. This very letter was begging me to “ do nothing ill-judged ” lest I bring “ the King's wrath on not only myself, but all of my kin as well. ” Such whinings always

## *"—THE TREE IS INCLINED"* 21

aroused my temper, which, I sometimes fear, lies too close to the surface. And so it was in an ill humor that I turned to the soldier who had addressed me, and who still stood at salute while I scowled at the pages before me.

"Well, Bates, what is it? Don't stand there like a scarecrow!" Which ill speech shows what a crusty temper I was in.

"Your pardon, sir, but it's orders to remain at salute until the superior answers, sir."

In a moment I had caught my senses again. "Of course it is, Bates," I replied, humbly, "and you're a faithful soldier. I was vexed at other things and vented my wrath on you. What is your wish?"

"General Washington directs that you report to him at once, sir."

You may be sure that the summons set my heart a-thumping. Not one of my brother officers but would have charged a British battery single-handed if by so doing he could earn a summons by the Chief, and this knowledge caused me to come out of my cloud of gloom instant. What the summons might mean I had not the slightest idea, but that it could not be of ill import I knew, for, so far, my military record was stainless, whatever the future might hold in store for me.

And so, dressed my smartest, which was sorry enough, the good Lord knows, I soon betook myself to headquarters, a place admirably situated as regarded easy communication with any portion of the Patriot army, that now held New York. The Chief was alone in his office when I was shown in.

"Ah, Captain Lester?" There was a question in his tone.

"Yes, sir." And I bowed.

Washington did not rise, but sat regarding me critically for a moment as I stood at attention, making the most of my inches. Those calm eyes seemed searching my soul in that period of silence, and I remember wondering if he would discover the vanity that was rioting in my breast because of the summons. Then he smiled, and his cold face was transformed.

"You'll do, Captain! Pray be seated."

Without further preliminaries he drew a small packet of papers from the desk, and laid them before me.

"I have heard you spoken of as a brave, discreet soldier — Ah, good! You blush!" In truth, my face was flaming like a schoolgirl's. "There is worth in the man who blushes," he added,

I racked my brains for an answer, but confusion held my tongue, and, try as I would, I could but sit mute, fingering my sabre nervously. His face was grave again.

“You must know, Captain, that our position here is precarious. Howe may appear at any day with an overwhelming force. But even that is not the worst danger that confronts us. Our troops are poorly equipped, they have no money; in many instances their families at home are in dire want. Patriotism is ebbing, and on the rolls of your own troop I doubt not there are many marked, ‘Deserted.’ And among those who should be my most loyal officers intrigue has found a home. They seek to put another in my place, and —”

“Devil take them!” I cried, springing to my feet, carried away by the recital, for while the words of it may sound calm enough to you, could you have seen the sadness that stole into every line of that proud face, could you have heard the note of sorrow that burdened each word, you would realize the emotion that jerked me to my feet and sent my pulse a-bounding with my desire to make the traitors feel the sting of my steel.

“Easy, Captain,” was the Chief’s soft answer,

and one great hand was upraised in deprecation. I dropped back into my chair, my tongue glib enough now with apologies.

"So, you can do other things than blush," he said, a faint smile again visible.

"I can fight for you, sir!" I cried, the blood not yet out of my head.

"Not for me, Captain, but for your country." He took up the papers again. "These must reach Philadelphia, and I have selected you to take them there. You will find them properly addressed. One is to be delivered to Congress without delay, another is to be placed in the hands of one of the most active Tories in the land, Peter Langford, a man of great wealth, and a resident of Philadelphia. And this communication —" he drew a paper from the packet — "must be dropped, apparently by accident, in his house in order that it may fall into his hands. The details you must work out for yourself, *but see that it falls into Langford's hands apparently without your knowledge.* You understand?"

"I do, sir," I replied, simply.

"I dislike to take harsh measures with those not in arms, but this Langford is one of the most dangerous enemies of the American cause, and so I have taken occasion to warn him in the one

communication and to give him seemingly accidental possession of the other in order that I may see the result — whether he will heed the warning or attempt ruin to our cause by what he will consider valuable information. Will you take an escort or go alone? ”

“ Alone, I think, sir. An escort would but invite attack, with few more chances of successful resistance, and decidedly less opportunities of escape by dodging.”

“ My idea. I am more than ever pleased with you, Lester. When will you start? ”

“ Within the hour, sir.”

As I saluted and would have withdrawn, he arose and, towering over me, grasped my hand and squeezed it.

“ Report back to me — when and where you can,” he said.

It was considerably less than an hour later that I was pounding along towards our outposts, a song in my heart. Then, after dismounting and whispering the countersign numberless times, I was galloping along country lanes and past fields where none but women and young boys were to be seen at work, the husbands and fathers being with Washington. I wore my uniform, for the risk was but little more, and I did not fancy being

hung as a spy if caught in civilian's garb. I had marched up the Kennebec with Arnold and had won my captaincy in the charge amid the snows of Quebec. I saw the gallant Arnold fall that day of disaster, and would have challenged the man who would have told me then that the time would come when the army instead of singing of his valor and patriotism would be cursing the name of Benedict Arnold, traitor.

I have no mind to tell you of that journey to Philadelphia and of my petty adventures. It was getting dusk on the evening of July 3, 1776, when my wearied horse carried me across the Delaware and into the Quaker capital. The war had not yet touched this section, and in place of the frowning ramparts to which I had been accustomed for these many months, I saw terraced lawns; instead of the tread of soldiers, I heard the trampling of feet on pleasure or trade bent.

A carriage drawn by a magnificent team of spirited animals suddenly swung around a corner, and as I reined sharply to one side to avoid a collision, the flunkey on the seat cut my horse sharply with his whip. White with rage, I wheeled, intending to spur after and cut him down, but at that moment a mocking laugh rang out,

and my eyes turned from the flunkey to the occupants, one a young lady whose features I could not clearly distinguish in the gathering gloom, and the other a man, evidently of about my own age, and dressed in the height of the prevailing fashion. Nothing more did I note concerning him, but I sat rigid in my saddle staring at the face of the young woman, who was now looking back over her shoulder as the carriage whirled on. In truth, a pretty face was always my weakness, and so I sat there like a clown, instead of spurring forward to vengeance. As seen in the gloom, she was fair of complexion, her hair of the shade of copper, her — But again came that laugh, and I swore like a sailor, consigning the entire sex to perdition for their beauty and their mockery.

An old negro came mincing along, crooning a song, and something in the quaint melody struck a chord in my heart that had remained silent while the years crowded my boyhood into its tomb. In a moment I was off my horse and was standing before him, causing him to start back in alarm.

“ Rattle, you black angel! ” I cried, forgetting for the moment that all angels, whether white or black, were popularly pictured as being feminine.



He gazed at me, his eyes slowly widening. Then his teeth began to show in a grin, and before I could have prevented him if I had wanted to, which I assuredly did not, he had wrapped his arms about me and was hugging me.

“ ‘Fore God, Marse Ian, de ol’ man done thought it was a ha’nt! ”

“ Nonsense, you old rascal,” (Queer, isn’t it, how we mix up our endearing terms?) “ you never saw a spook in your life.”

“ No, suh, nebber did; dat’s a fac’, but I’m ‘spectin’ to, suh, an’, de Lord lub ye, Marse Ian, I thought fer suah you was in dat place whar de spooks hides.” He released me and then stepping back a pace, he put his hands on his knees and half-stooped as he regarded me curiously. “ What become o’ dat li’l’ boy, Ian, what I useter ca’y on dese yere ol’ shoulders, huh? Whar he is, Marse Soldier? An’ what you all doin’ wif dat voice o’ his, an’ dat laugh o’ his, an’ — ” he reached forward and raked back the hair from my forehead — “ an’ what is you doin’ wif dat scar? Huh, Marse Soldier? If dis ain’t spook work den de voodoo man am a liar. Huh? ”

“ That boy died long ago — before his youth had fled — at the hands of the King’s hirelings, Rassele, and from his grave arose a man whose

heart burned with a desire to avenge the boy's death, a man God-blessed with strength to do the heart's will.”

“ Don' un'erstan' it, Marse Ian — I mean, Marse Soldier — don' un'erstan' it at all. Why, 'tain't been but er li'l' while since I done toted 'im on my back, an' ol' Marse John — may de blessed God rest his soul! — he look on mighty proud like, an' tell ol' Rassle ter be keerful o' de boy. An' de sweet ol' Missus — Marse Soldier — she done fade erway jes' like a rose when de fros' come. Jes' er li'l' while ergo, jes' er li'l' while ergo 'twas, 'cause I kin hear 'er singin' right dis minute, jes' sweet an' low like de Souf win's what uster come in de June twilights:

“ In de good ship Zion we are sailin' to our home,  
Though de waves may dash and billers roll.”

With his arms half-outstretched he swung them back and forth to the rhythm of the song, and I — ? That chord he had touched in my bosom was seconding the words; Memory was swelling the music until my eyes were growing misty and I scarce could see him. Faithful old servant in my father's family he had been for years, until Tragedy swept that home away and he was compelled to turn to strangers.

"Yes," I whispered, "like the South winds in the June twilights. So soft! So sweet! And — yes — 'twas just like a rose she faded, Rasse — just as you say! Like a rose when the frost comes."

"But de good God done watches over de roses what fades, Marse Ian, an' when de fros' cuts off de pretty flowers He done takes 'em up fer to decorate His throne. An' dar ol' Rasse gwine ter see de sweet ol' Missus bimeby — up dar whar no fros' cain't come, an' whar it is always Junetime, wif de Souf win's."

"Well, Rasse, enough of this," I said, clicking my feet together and trying to resurrect Ian Lester, the soldier, from the tomb in which I had for the moment placed him in order to again be Ian Lester, the boy. "It is not strange in these days of blood that you thought me dead, but what of yourself? You appear prosperous."

The old fellow straightened himself and stood stiffly erect, his chest puffed out in a comical effort to assume a look of dignity.

"I'se monstrous gran', Marse Ian, I suhtenly is monstrous gran' dese days. I'se de gen — de gener'lis'mo o' de colored help up to Marse Peter Langford's house, an' — "

"The generalissimo at Peter Langford's! Peter Langford, the Tory? "

“—THE TREE IS INCLINED” 31

“Sh-h! Marse Ian, do be keerful o’ yer tongue. Dey don’ like dat word ‘Tory,’ dese fine gen’le-mens don’, an’ so I’se ’bleeged ter say dat I’se de gener—what ye said—at Marse Peter Langford’s, de *Loyalist*. An’ I’se monstrous gran’ up dere, lemme tell ye. An’ I aint ‘Rassle’ no more, but ‘E-ras-mus.’ ”

The old fellow chuckled at the thoughts of his “grandness,” so unlike the old days when he was as near a part of our family as black servants ever came to be in any family, and I had dubbed him “Rassle,” a name that clung to him until he entered upon his present “grandness.”

“Then I am more than ever pleased at finding you,” I said. “I am going to his house this evening.”

“Wh-wh-a-at? Marse Soldier, in dem clothes?”

“Certainly. Why not?”

“’Fore God, Marse Langford’ll throw er fit when he sees er rebel uniform in his house.”

“Then let him, for to-night I will be there.”

“An’ *ter-night*! He-he-he-haw-haw!” He burst into laughter. “What er time dar’s gwine ter be in dat house dis night!”

“Is there anything especially amusing about the date that has been chosen for my visit?”

“Yes, suh, dar suhtenly is, fer *ter-night* dar’s

gwine ter be a gran' fancy ball fer de young Missy Gayle an' fer some German Prince wif er name dat done loosens my teef every time I gits gran' an' tries ter say it. De Prince he been hyar fer some time, an' de black folks say he powe'ful sweet on Missy Gayle, an' ol' Marse Langford an' ol' Missus Langford " (his voice sank to a whisper) "dey monstrous fond er titles."

The old darky picked up a stick and began to mark:

"Hyar de title, an' hyar Marse Langford's money, an' dese two dey jes' keep a leakin', an' a leakin', an' a l-e-a-k-i-n' towards each other, until bimeby dey's gwine ter git tergedder. An' fer er feller what's fightin' 'ginst er king ter march inter dat crowd wif his uniform on — Oh, Lord! Marse Ian, don' do it!"

"Devil a snap care I for their titles, their money, and their salable womanflesh. It's orders, Rassel, and I'm going. And as for you, no matter what happens, forget you ever knew me."

"Yes, suh, Marse Ian, I'se gwine ter fergit, I'se gwine ter remember dat, but you'se er gwine inter a wasp nest. Dey mayn't hurt ye bad, but dey'll suhtenly sting ye, Marse Ian. But I mus' be er-gwine, 'cause dere's big doin's dar ter-night, an' I'se monstrous gran' as de gener'lis'mo."

He chuckled again and went mincing away while I mounted and rode to the Golden Lion, a modest tavern, where I demanded accommodations for myself and beast. The signboard bore a rude imitation of the royal coat of arms, but the landlord was said to be secretly a Patriot sympathizer, though cringing and timorous to a degree that kept him constantly shifting in his efforts to balance his principles on both shoulders. As I strode into the tap-room with spurs and sabre clanking I created a mild sort of a sensation, and very shortly I observed two or three of the loafers who had been watching me uneasily slink out of the door and disappear. “Tories, and scared limber for fear vengeance is come,” I said to myself, and I have never changed my mind.

I was given a room and a tub of water, in which I was soon splashing merrily, and then with the aid of a broom the dust was taken out of my clothes as much as possible, and after a mug of ale and a steaming supper I stepped forth into the night a different-looking figure from the weary one who had ridden there two hours before. The despatch to Congress remained sewed in the waistband of my trousers, to be ripped out and delivered on the morrow. The letter to Langford and the one I was to lose were in an inner pocket.

As I approached Langford's I saw that Rassel had not exaggerated. There was every evidence of "big doin's" at hand. The mansion sat back from the street quite a distance, and the walk leading to it was shaded by a row of trees on either side. From these trees giant lanterns hung this night, making a pathway of light. This pathway no rebel feet were expected to tread, but on that July night the negroes in scarlet and gold livery who stood at the entrance gasped with astonishment, for with head erect and sword dangling, a captain of the Continental army, in full uniform, strode past them and marched up the avenue of Tory magnificence to the house a-glitter from ground to dome with many candles. And then this captain raised the great knocker and sent a summons thundering through the halls. A black servant in livery swung open the door, and then sprang back.

"I wish to see Mr. Langford at once," I said.

"Yes, suh; step in, suh," responded the servant, his years of training governing. "This way, suh," and he led me through a grand hallway and ushered me into a library. "What name, suh?"

"Never mind the name. Tell him it is important, and that will do."

The room was a spacious one and fitted with all of the luxury great wealth could command. Costly paintings hung on the walls, and rare books were on the shelves. A long table and easy chairs were there, but I had not time to stare further, for the door opened and into the room stepped a man dressed in the prevailing fashion of an old English gentleman of wealth, the buckles on his shoes being pure silver, his stockings of finest spun silk; deep ruffles of rare lace hung about his hands, while the rest of his attire was a bewildering arrangement of satin and silks, and his hair, worn in an aristocratic queue, was powdered snow white. He was near seventy years of age, stout built, and with a face so red as to suggest the nearness of palsy.

“Well, damn me!” he exclaimed, halting as he caught sight of a rebel uniform before him.

I bowed as gracefully as possible. “Mr. Peter Langford, I presume,” I said, though I knew ’twas he.

“It is, sir,” he responded, sharply, his eyes slowly taking me in from sole to crown. “And who the devil are you, sir, that you are here in such a clownish costume?”

“Ian Lester, Captain in the Continental Army, at your service, sir, and here by orders of his



Excellency, George Washington, Commander-in-Chief of the Patriot forces."

"Patriot! Rebel pigs! And what prompts your *Mister* Washington to send you to me?"

"A letter, sir," and I drew it forth, at the same time loosening the other in my pocket so that I could drop it when I thought best.

He looked at the communication a moment, and then as he was about to break the seal, he paused and motioned to a chair.

"Be seated, *Mister* Lester."

I took the seat, watching him intently as he stood nervously tearing his way to the contents of the letter. As he read, I saw his expression change from surprise to anger, then fear, and finally rage, until, as he finished, he crushed the paper in his hands and stood over me as though about to strike. If he expected me to spring from my chair in alarm he met with disappointment. Curses fell from his lips until as a trooper and one accustomed to profanity, I was forced to admire his command of it. I remember once, a year later, when my horse was stung by a bullet during a skirmish and bolted to the rear with me while shouts and jeers assailed me, how I prayed for Peter Langford's stock of words and phrases to pour out on that beast.

“ And do you know the contents of this letter? ” he shouted, after he had again taken breath.

“ I have not the honor of reading General Washington’s correspondence,” I replied, beginning to be amused.

He dropped into a chair, spread the crumpled sheet on the table, piecing in a portion he had torn off in his rage, and read it again. In the pause that followed, I heard a masculine voice somewhere down the corridor raised in a short refrain, and though I was not linguist enough to understand the words, I recognized them as German. “ The Prince,” I thought. Then a feminine voice, a sweet contralto, took up the words, and the song came towards me. I glanced again at Langford. The purple of his rage was giving way to the pallor of his fear.

“ Any reply, sir? ” I asked.

“ Yes. Tell your Washington I said be damned to him! No! No — wait — I’ll write him and — ”

But I did not hear the rest. The duet had stopped at our door, there was a burst of laughter in which there was a note that set my pulse a-jumping, and then the door opened and in the singers stepped. A prince, evidently, was the man, judging by the decorations he wore; a German without a doubt, by the nationality

stamped on his features; a man of twenty-six, perhaps, rather large of frame and florid of countenance; his clothes all that fashion could demand or money provide. But the face of the girl I had seen before — looking back at me as her carriage had whirled away in the dusk and I had sat in my saddle thirsting for the blood of her flunkey.

Seen now in the brilliance of many candles, I could not say her beauty was perfect. Here and there was an undeniable freckle, but her blue eyes looked out into the world from beneath cunningly arched eyebrows, and above them was a forehead as smooth as velvet, receding back into a bounteous mass of hair that had the dull gleam of copper. But her eyes were the most wonderful into which I had ever gazed. Dancing with merriment as she entered the room, as the firelight flickers on the polished andirons, they suddenly changed as she caught sight of me, and I saw the warmth fade and a look of cold hauteur steal into them, and, carrying out the figure of comparison, I imagined I felt the chill of the frost as it chased the firelight's glow from the fire-dogs.

“ Ah, a pardon, Herr Langford. We knew not that this room was occupied.” ’Twas the man who spoke, his English excellent.

“ Never mind, Prince, do not go. I will soon dismiss this — ”

I was already on my feet and sweeping my hat to the floor in my most gallant obeisance to the lady, so I stole his insult by an interruption.

“ This messenger from General Washington,” I exclaimed quickly. “ Ian Lester, Captain in the Continental Army.”

For my speech I was rewarded by a burst of laughter from the girl, and its sarcasm penetrated even my armor, that I had prided myself was proof against Tory ridicule. I squared my shoulders, but could not hide from her the evidence that I was hit, for my tanned face had flushed a deeper red.

“ See, Prince,” she said, turning to her companion, “ the man is really haughty, quite as haughty as — as Erasmus, our generalissimo.” And again there was a burst of mocking laughter that stung me.

“ ’Tis because of a serene consciousness of proper demeanor,” I replied, quickly. “ As a soldier, I have my duties, and these have I performed in a manner that leaves no reproach on my pride. Doubtless, your generalissimo is proud of the same freedom from error. Even so fair a lady as yourself has resting upon her

shoulders obligations towards those who are beneath her roof by invitation or by — duty, shall I say? I trust your haughtiness is born of as untroubled a conscience as mine — and your servant's."

I saw the color flame to her cheeks and knew I had slipped the thrust beneath her guard. The Prince stepped forward quickly, anger blazing in every line of his features. I smiled into his face.

"*Gott!*" he exclaimed, his anger confusing his English. "It is such insult!"

But the girl stepped between us, and though her cheeks were still red, the frost had left her eyes.

"Nay, Prince," she said, bravely. "'Tis but a merited rebuke! In truth, he has a more civil tongue than I."

And I? The sudden warming glimpse of a noble nature melted me and I would have snatched her hand and kissed it, but the harsh voice of Langford brought me to myself again.

"I must have time to consider my reply to your Mister Washington! Already are the guests arriving for the ball, and they demand my attention! How will three to-morrow afternoon do?"

"Your pleasure is mine, sir," I replied.

I saw 'twas time I dropped my decoy letter,

and as I bowed to him the deed was done. I heard the slightest crinkle of paper as it fell lightly to the floor, and the eager light that leaped to the old Tory's eyes told me that the bait would be seized. The girl had crossed to another part of the room, and I rejoiced when I noted that she had not seen the paper fall. Somehow, since her sudden warming a moment before, I had hoped that she would not acquiesce in the purloining of another's papers! Langford hastily arose to his feet, and I turned away a moment to give him his opportunity. When I faced him again I adjusted my sword belt and thus, dropping my eyes, saw that the paper no longer lay on the floor. Langford appeared to be in a deep study, and as I turned to take my leave, he stopped me.

“ One moment. I would have a word with the Prince first.”

He led the German aside and spoke to him earnestly, and then the latter nodded his head. Langford turned to me.

“ Will you accept an invitation to be my guest until I have prepared my letter to Washington? ”

I stood dumb with surprise. The girl turned quickly and stared at him in amazement. My thoughts were galloping, but I could not solve the puzzle. However, it seemed that a stay

beneath Langford's roof might promise adventures of some sort, and as I was rusting because of a lack of thrills, I decided to remain.

The girl's eyes were upon me, and my resolution was strengthened when I saw no trace of winter there.

"Surely," I replied. "I will be most honored."

## CHAPTER III

### THE PRESENT MEETS THE PAST

A SERVANT showed me to a room, where I added a few touches to my toilet and made ready to play my part in this strange proceeding. Why should I, a rough captain of Continentals, be asked to attend this brilliant affair to which none but the most loyal subjects of his Majesty, King George, were supposed to be bidden? Once had I urged upon Langford the sensation my uniform would create in the ballroom and parlors, but he replied that as 'twas a fancy dress ball all sorts of characters would be represented, and that my appearance as a rebel soldier would be regarded but as a freak idea of some young gallant. However, he added, with a cold smile, if I was ashamed so to appear among ladies and gentlemen I could either remain in seclusion or he would provide me with fitter costume.

If he had sought to touch my pride, he suc-



ceeded, and I thought of what Rassel had said: "Dey mayn't hurt ye bad, but dey'll suhtenly sting ye." Indeed, I began to suspect this to be his reason for inviting me. Did he wish me to be impressed with the splendor of it all and to contrast it with the wretchedness of the Patriot conditions in the hope that I would carry discouraging reports back to the army?

"I'll wear my uniform, sir," I said, "and will look in upon the festivities."

Long before I had put the finishing touches to my priming I heard the fiddles sounding in the rooms below, and half an hour later when I descended I could not repress an exclamation of admiration for the magnificence of the scene. The floors of the rooms were polished until they reflected the light of many massive candles, the fragrance from a wilderness of flowers banked here and there greeted me; and the brilliance of the silks, satins, brocades, and laces of both ladies and gentlemen caused me to survey rather ruefully the blue and buff of my poor uniform.

As I surmised, the appearance of one in the Continental uniform startled the revellers, but a moment later they smiled in the belief that 'twas but a masquerade.

I heard a murmur and saw a sudden craning of

necks, and looked around just in time to see Gayle Langford enter the room on the arm of the Prince, who now wore the full uniform of a Hessian colonel, a most brilliant bit of dress, you who know the conceit of it will agree. At his side dangled a jewelled sword of exquisite workmanship. I balk at the telling of how the fair Tory was gowned, for, blunt man of war that I was, I had no descriptive eye for feminine furbelows, but this I know, 'twas a wondrously beautiful creation of finest fabrics, cut low enough to reveal a neck of perfection and just a modest bit of well-turned shoulder. I confess it, they were a distinguished, a handsome couple, and I am not sure but that I did think for a moment of the wretched contrast of the conditions of the Patriots. Was it not, after all, a foolish, hopeless struggle in which we were engaged? But I rejoice that a blush of shame for the harboring of such fancies soon warmed my cheek! The couple at once became the centre of a chattering, laughing group, at whose outer edge I hovered. Then as the strains of the minuet sounded to the sweep of the rosined bows the group dissolved and left the Prince and Mistress Gayle momentarily alone. A sudden resolve flashed to my brain, and with a few quick strides I stood before her, bowing:

" 'Tis the minuet! May I have the honor? " I asked.

'Twas a bold stroke, and I quite expected the gasp of astonishment from the Prince and the look of resentment that flashed in her eyes. She drew back, her chin uptilted in the queenly hauteur that certainly became her wondrously well.

" Impertinent! " she exclaimed, her tone icy.

" And when did it become impertinence for a gentleman to crave a lady's hand in the dance? "

" I do not know you, sir! "

The depth of scorn in her voice rather amused me, for I had determined to humble her pride.

" Ah, " I replied, smiling, " your memory is poor. But an hour ago I had the honor of presenting myself, Ian Lester, courier of his Excellency, General Washington. "

Never an opportunity I allowed to pass for the hurling at these Tories the name and rank of the Washington they hated. She indulged in the very feminine practice of biting her lower lip and tapping the toe of one daintily slippered foot on the floor.

" But by what right can such as you demand my company? "

## PRESENT MEETS THE PAST 47

“Not ‘demand,’ but ‘beg,’ — and by the right of a guest here by invitation.”

Then fury gathered in her eyes, and for a few breaths I thought my throat was in danger of a clutch by those jewelled fingers. I stepped to her side and offered my arm. My uniform had made me conspicuous, and already many eyes were focusing on us! She hesitated, and then fearing to refuse in the sight of her staring guests, she slipped her hand within the crook of my elbow.

“*Fraulein!*”

The Prince, who had stood stiffly by, clutched her wrist, but, already quivering with anger, she shook herself free from his grasp.

“Your Highness forgets himself!” she said, sharply. “Mister Lester is my father’s guest. Come,” she added, turning to me, “they await us.”

We turned to take our places in the minuet, but as we did so the Prince flashed me a look so full of hatred that the soft cluck of my sword trappings was comforting as I led the lady from his side. That his discomfiture had not escaped the notice of others was evident by the half-suppressed smiles discernible on many faces turned in our direction.

And then I forgot all about the glowering German as we trod the measures of the stately minuet. Beautiful women curtsied and tripped gracefully to the passionate voice of the fiddles, but, forgetting the decision I had reached in the library, I mentally swore that none there could compare with Mistress Gayle Langford. I forgot that she was an heiress, a loyal subject of the King, and that I was but little more than pauper, a rebel against all she held dear; I forgot Washington and the ragged battalions; I forgot all but the melody, rising, trembling, sinking, pleading; the fragrance of rare flowers that stole to my brain and robbed my intellect of its powers; the merry quip of youth and beauty. In truth, I came near forgetting all but the radiant woman to whom I bowed more profoundly than to any other.

" 'Tis in the minuet that the longing for eternal youth is born," I said.

" 'Tis youth itself," she returned. " Pray tell me, what weight have years when its measures sound? "

Her cheeks were glowing, her eyes shone with a lustre that rivalled the stars of heaven, and as I gazed into them I heard a great crying in my soul.

" Years? None — that is, if Love be the scales.

But unless they be weighed by heart-throbs they lie as millstones."

'Twas in the order of the dance that at that moment I should bow to her, and you may be sure that all the grace I could command was condensed into that obeisance.

"And, sir, 'twould seem that in the song of the fiddles there is that which oils the hinges of the tongue and places thereon pretty speeches."

"Ah, Mistress Langford, 'tis even so, but first doth the music carry the open sesame to the heart and release that which speeds to the tongue."

"In graceful flattery."

"Nay — in awkward honesty."

The music stopped. There was a burst of applause, in which my companion joined, but the musicians refused to continue the number. I drew Gayle Langford's hand within my arm and led her away.

"'Twas cruel in them to hush the fiddles," I said.

She made no reply, and glancing at her, I saw that the glow was dying from her cheeks, the enchantment of the music slowly fading. We passed behind an embankment of roses, and she suddenly snatched her hand from my arm. In surprise I turned to her.

"Permit me to find you a seat," I said.

"Leave me at once!" she cried. "I — I hate you! Do you hear, sir? I *hate* you, you rebel!"

I stood staring, not yet fully aroused from my fool's paradise into which I had been wooed by the minuet. The next instant she had brushed aside a curtain and disappeared within another room. Ah, well, it was no more than I should have expected, so what need to stand there like a bumpkin?

I strolled leisurely about, stopping now and then to flip a jest with some inquisitive gallant who wondered at my uniform, and now and then I ogled pretty girls who from behind their fans sought conquest by dimpling cheeks and arching brows. I wonder if 'tis sin that my pulse still quickens at the arching of a brow and the coy challenge of a smile?

Once I peeped into a room and saw old Peter Langford seated at a table, several other men leaning forward to hear what he was saying. In his hands he held a paper, and I had no doubt that it was the one I had dropped on his library floor. Evidently a council was being held by a few trusted spirits, and I would have chanced much to learn what was being said, but it was

impossible, for guests were constantly passing, and even as I peeped into the room I knew that I was observed by those without. Therefore, I dared not hesitate, but passed on. I did not care to return to the ballroom. There I had accomplished more than I had hoped. Now for seclusion and a chance for thought.

I heard voices in a near-by room and, finding the door half-open, looked in. A cloud of fragrant tobacco smoke was rising, and about the room three men were lounging, pipes in mouths.

"Your pardon, gentlemen. Do I intrude?"

"Intrude? No, no; a welcome, sir, and a pipe if you say the word."

Thus invited, I entered, and, taking a pipe from the mantel, filled it and settled back in contentment.

"My name is Boyd — Richard Boyd, and these, Thomas Dunn and Harry Thornton, all of Philadelphia, and loyal to the heart to King George," said one, gaily.

It was a direct invitation for me to introduce myself. I blew a ring of smoke and watched it widen. Then I replied:

"These many times to-night have I presented myself, and will I do it again. Gentlemen, your servant, Ian Lester, Captain in the Continental



army, courier for General Washington, and to the last drop of blood in my heart loyal to the cause of American liberty!"

I sent two more smoke rings floating towards the ceiling before the silence that followed was broken. Then Boyd smote his thigh with his palm and, leaning back in his chair, roared with laughter, in which his companions quickly joined.

"Good!" he shouted. "'Fore God, you're a good one, sir. You have taught us how to masquerade. Here you, Dunn, — you with your brigand's garb, — learn wisdom from our friend. Instead of merely looking fierce, you should stick to your rôle and lift the purses of all you meet."

I smiled, and after a few minutes' raillery, in which I am sure I gave full measure in return for all I received, the trio knocked the ashes from their pipes, and declared their intentions of seeking the ladies.

"And, mayhap, a buss from rosy lips, in the garden, eh, my Captain?" And Boyd slapped me on the shoulder as they went out.

I was grateful for being left alone, and allowed my thoughts to riot as I drew the smoke in long, full whiffs. A window opened out into the

grounds lighted here and there by lanterns, and occasionally bursts of song and laughter would float in from those who had deserted the ball-room for the cool pleasures of a promenade beneath the trees — and, mayhap, a buss from rosy lips.

The cry of a night-bird came to me and made me lonely, for it brought vividly to my mind a night scout I had made some months before with Lieutenant Wilson, and how we had agreed on an imitation of a night-bird's cry as a signal. But Wilson, poor fellow, failed in his sounding of the signal, was seized with a fit of coughing, and was riddled by bullets from a British outpost the next instant, while I had the devil's own ride in escaping. The war had but fairly begun; I knew that. It must be years ere peace could come. And would it be peace with liberty, or would it be peace with tyranny? And would I witness the sheathing of the sword, or would my bones lie in some unmarked spot, as would, of a certainty, the skeletons of hundreds no less entitled to life and happiness than I? I had been impatient to draw the sword, 'tis true, but, after all, was not the cost to be greater than I had recked? But I had been right, I told myself; the birth of a nation must be in blood and agony. I blew

other rings, and then turned my head to see the Prince standing in the doorway, his hands on his hips, regarding me with a cold stare.

"All alone, your Highness, won't you join me? I've been deserted by my friends, Tom, Dick, and Harry." I smiled at my jest, but the German ignored it.

"Herr Lester is light of heart," he said, coming in and seating himself facing me.

"Assuredly. Gloom is the heritage of defeat."

Again I smiled at him, and had the satisfaction of seeing his lips tighten. 'Twas evident he remembered the minuet.

"And does not the shadow of the traitor's gallows to your heart uneasiness bring?"

"True it is, your Highness, that definitions alter with the prejudices of the definer. By the King's men I am called a traitor; by the lovers of liberty I am called a Patriot."

A sardonic smile parted his lips and his hands were raised to his throat in significant pantomime.

"Ach!" he exclaimed. "Patriot be it then — but the rope will be as rough! The noose strangles definitions!"

I would not be truthful did I not confess to the chill that crept up my spine at the picture he drew so vividly with word and gesture, but I am

certain that naught but indifference was in my face as I puffed at my pipe.

"Bullet or noose, 'tis but a fleeting difference," I said. "Frankly, I prefer neither, but the choice is not mine. I yielded that when I drew the sword. And, after all, what matters a few years more or less of breathing? Will not my rest be as peaceful if it comes next week instead of next year?"

"But it is folly, Herr Lester. Think you that your jealous mobs can conquer the trained soldiers of his Majesty, the King?"

"We shall have help —"

"Bah! France will not aid you."

"— From God," I said, as though concluding my interrupted sentence.

I knew that what he said was truth. The eyes of the Patriot leaders were turned to France, but that wily nation had so far given no sign of noticing our appeal for help in the crisis into which she had undoubtedly encouraged us to enter.

"God will not produce men and muskets where none exist," he replied with biting sarcasm.

"But perhaps He will create a storm and drown some of these cursed Hessians that are sailing to America to fight us because George Third bought them at seven pounds per head!" I

retorted, and then let my eyes slowly roam over the gorgeous uniform he wore.

He gasped out something in German that had no meaning to me, but by the flush in his face and the angry gleam of his eyes, I felt assured I was not missing any compliments by not understanding that language. That he had sought me for the purpose of picking a quarrel I had no doubt, and I cannot say I was displeased.

"Enough of this!" he exclaimed, hotly. "I have come to ask if an apology you have made to Fraulein Langford?"

"Apology? Certainly not. For what?"

"For the impertinence of the minuet, you Colonial clown! She is not for such pauper rebels as you!"

"Nor for such bankrupt titles as you!" I shouted, exasperated beyond all control.

"You have a tongue like a rapier!" he hissed.

"And an arm like hickory!" I hurled back.

In an instant we were on our feet, and our blades flashed in the candle-light as he lunged at me and I parried. The table was between us, but I grabbed it with my left hand and sent it crashing, pipes, tobacco, and all, into the corner, and then we leaped at each other, the lust of death in our veins. There was one clash, and then —

*"Gentlemen!"*

Between us darted Gayle Langford so recklessly that she came near being spitted on my steel.

Instantly the blades were lowered, and as she turned on us those wonderful eyes, now flashing with indignation, I flung my sword on the floor and dropped my head.

"I know I am beyond pardon, Mistress Langford, for brawling beneath your roof, yet would I crave leniency of condemnation."

"She saved your worthless life, rebel!" rasped the Prince.

I thought she would rebuke him for his lack of manners in her presence, but, heigho! I had reckoned without her sex, for she simply slipped her hand within the crook of his arm and turned her back to me.

"Prince, my father has asked me to fetch you," she said, and they walked out of the room, leaving me standing there as though I were one of the servants. But even in that moment of humiliation I admired the proud poise of her head, the glimpse of snowy shoulder — but I cursed the broad shoulders beside her that were gaudy with Hessian colors.

If she had but delayed, I growled to myself, I would have slit that finery over his jealous heart.

But the thought brought a smile. What under heaven was the prig jealous of? Of me, a pauper rebel? The smile broadened into a chuckle, and 'twas in a right good humor that I picked up my sword from the floor and began righting the table. He might rest easy; I wanted none of that little Tory spitfire in mine.

I was of a mind to return to the ballroom and make bold with my eyes and my bows should I trap a flirtatious smile — and mayhap 'twould lead to a stroll beneath the trees, and a buss from rosy lips. My sword was my country's, but my arms and my lips — ah, well, they were for Loyalist and Patriot alike, providing the Loyalist or Patriot were youngish and fair. Indeed, I believe I would have gone forthwith on my scandalous mission of amours had not Boyd popped his head into the room at that moment.

"Hello!" he cried, cheerily. "The Continentals are still intrenched here, are they?"

"Yes, I have been smoking the pipe of peace," and I pointed to the tobacco.

"Well, it's a devilish shame the Colonists and King George can't do that," he replied. "Damn me — er — Captain Lester, I believe you said — if I don't half sympathize with these ragged chaps who are following Washington!"

"Boyd, do you mean that?" I cried, springing forward and clutching him by the shoulder.

He met my eyes unflinchingly. "I suppose it's treason, sir, but I'm man enough to swear I mean it, though but an hour ago I swore my loyalty to the King. I tell you again, as freely as though you were what your cloth proclaims you, I half — aye, more than half — sympathize with Washington's cause."

I seized his hand. "Boyd!" I exclaimed. "Boyd, I am what my cloth proclaims, a Continental captain. The cause needs men like you — needs you. Decide!"

He stared at me, and I felt his hand trembling with the emotions that were sweeping over him, with the fires of patriotism that were kindling in his soul. Ah, 'twas a bold thing in those days to make declaration as he had, and 'twas a leap into untold dangers to spring forth from the ranks of the King's men into the undisciplined, ill-equipped, gloomy lines of Continentals.

"And now a horde of Hessian hirelings are to be set upon Americans fighting for — justice, they say now; after to-morrow — independence!" He had turned to the window and was looking out into the gardens, his forehead wrinkled as though with deep study.



"Independence — to-morrow?" I cried.

"Aye, to-morrow, I doubt not, Congress will pass the Declaration of Independence, and then men must choose whether they are for liberty or the bondage of a king's will. There can be no middle ground."

"And you, Boyd? Are you not with us?"

He was silent for a moment, and then he turned towards me, his shoulders squared, his head erect, his eyes unwavering, and when he spoke his voice was steady, his tones even.

"Lester, by the God above me, I am with you!"

Then his hand met mine, and I knew that so long as breath remained in our bodies we were to be friends.

A blast rang through the mansion, and a moment later was sounding through the gardens.

"The summons to the banquet table," said Boyd. "Come, you have no lady; neither have I. Together let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow — tyranny dies!"

Our laughs rang together as he linked his arm with mine and led me to the feast.

Ah, 'twas an assemblage of wealth and fashion and beauty that sat at table within that grand hall. The gorgeous costumes of the ladies and gentlemen, the flashing of the candles' light on

the gold and silver of the table service, the garlands of fragrant roses, the corps of black servants in brilliant liveries, formed a picture I'll never forget. And Erasmus, the generalissimo, looking "monstrous grand," stood near by, directing the servants, though he near forgot his duties in astonishment when he saw me striding down the room in the full regimentals of a rebel. But far be it from me to attempt to tell you of the edibles set before us at that gathering. Though I had been well born and reared, I had to confess my ignorance as to the composition of many of the chef's concoctions, but they were all tasty, and as my appetite had become quite vigorous by reason of months of campaigning with rations always an after consideration, I heeded but little the quip and jest that darted back and forth, across and around the table, frequently with "the rebel" as the butt of it, but devoted my attention to the getting of a good supper. I knew not what might lie before me, but did know that a well-nourished body was a mighty bulwark for the intrenchment of a dauntless spirit, and if the Tories chose to help strengthen this bulwark — well, 'twas satisfactory to me.

At the head of the table sat Peter Langford, his flushed face in striking contrast with the

powdered whiteness of his hair. At the opposite end of the table sat his wife, a proud, imperious-appearing lady of sixty years, fashionably gowned in all the frills of the day. At the right hand of Langford sat his daughter, and beside her the Prince. Not once did I catch the girl's eyes on me. But the Prince! 'Twere well that looks were not rapiers, else had I perished from his eyes ere we had been at table a moment.

As the banquet proceeded and the wine quickened the blood, the merriment increased until the serving was interspersed with bedlam. The Prince was called on and responded with a German ballad that might as well have been Greek so far as my understanding was concerned, but truth compels me to say that the fellow had a splendid voice, and rendered the song so exceedingly well that even I joined in the hand-clapping, though he shot me another rapier from his eyes as my reward. Then above the general hubbub there was a cry for a toast from Mistress Langford. She hesitated a moment, and then arose to her feet, wine-glass in hand. Instantly there was silence. Then her glass was raised.

"Long live King George!" she cried, and kissed the goblet.

At the same moment, for the first time during

the banquet, her eyes shot to mine and held there, defiance and scorn eloquent in their glorious depths (for I felt that they were glorious, even in that moment). Her cheeks were flushed, her chin tip-tilted, a challenge to me in every fibre of her being.

At once, in response to her toast, the merry-makers sprang to their feet, and amid the chorus of "Long live King George!" the glasses were drained.

Impulsively, I had half-risen to my feet, but as her challenge flashed to me, I deliberately resumed my seat and set my glass, untouched by my lips, on the table. I thought I saw a change in her bearing as I did so, but whether of admiration for my audacity or of disdain I could not tell. In truth, my brain was busy with another problem that had suddenly been born to it in her toast, "Long live King George." That cry brought back something — but what was it? From some niche in the past that cry, that voice seemed to be coming to me as an echo. I struggled to sweep the cobwebs of years from the chambers of memory, but 'twas baffling. I heeded not the stare of the crowd as they noted my refusal of the toast; I heard not the whispers and murmurs; I was harking to the voice of memory; I was

travelling back through the years, probing, searching for the echo.

In my perplexity I ran my fingers through my hair, and as I did so I felt the jagged scar beneath my forelock, and then — I gasped as I suddenly raised my eyes and looked again into her face. I was a boy again, wounded and faint and sorrowing, marching through Boston's streets close-guarded by files of British soldiers, and I felt the sting of a pebble thrown at me by a freckle-faced, straw-haired little girl who shouted at me, "Long live King George!" and then burst into tears at sight of the dead borne close behind me. Aye, the past and present were united now in the person of this Tory maid.

"The Captain drinks not the toast," said the Prince, and I heard him.

"No, and it could not be expected that I would. 'Twould choke in my throat," I responded.

The company were mostly seated again, and Boyd, leaning toward me, whispered:

"Lester, I smell a row!"

"In truth, I like the scent," I retorted, and he subsided.

"Ach! It is in keeping with the rebel uniform that the wearer lacks breeding, and insults by refusing a lady's toast."

## PRESENT MEETS THE PAST 65

That the German was trying to provoke me to disgracing myself I realized. That he sought to force me to a duel I believed. Of the former I was chary, for the latter I was hotly impatient. Had I been close I would have dashed my wine in his face, but as it was I arose to my feet, choking down my anger and forcing a smile.

"Your Highness, and ladies and gentlemen," I said, bowing, "I will drink the lady's toast if she and you will drink one I shall propose."

"Agreed!" "Agreed!" The cries arose from all sides.

I raised my wine-glass and drained it. Then I exclaimed:

"'Tis a toast in two parts, and, sirs and ladies, did this goblet contain my heart's blood I would drink it. Here's success to *General* George Washington!"

An angry murmur arose.

"Drink!" I cried. "Your words are passed!"

With a laugh, many of them raised their glasses and gulped the toast.

"And now for the second part." I picked up a glass of water and raised it high, and then looked straight into the eyes of Gayle Langford.

"God rest the souls of the *Eagle's* men!"

## CHAPTER IV

### RED ROSES

**E**VEN now I cannot keep from my face the smiles as I recall the effect of my toast.

Mistress Gayle Langford I thought was near to swooning when I mentioned the *Eagle*. She started from her seat and reached out her hands towards me, much as a mother would in imploring a child, and I heard her moan as though stricken. 'Tis not this recollection that stirs my risibles, but the commotion that followed. Men were on their feet and surging towards me, clamoring excitedly, the Prince hurling German curses at my head and imploring the mob, for it was but little less by now, to let him reach me with his blade.

"Aye, let the Hessian peacock sink his steel in one who scorns to draw a blade in the presence of such a company!" I cried, standing erect with my arms folded, and the speech won me friends, for some of the cooler heads, now heartily

ashamed of the riot they had begun in the banquet-hall, began calming those about them.

I saw Gayle Langford lay her hand on the Prince's shoulder, and her lips moved quickly as though in sharp reprimand, though her words did not reach me. The German hesitated, and then, replacing his sword, turned sullenly towards the table and sat down. Peter Langford had pleaded for quiet, and now he resumed his seat. And then I chanced to catch sight of Erasmus, who stood in his corner, arms uplifted, and such a comical look of terror on his black face as he looked into my eyes that I laughed outright, and again took my place at the table.

"'Fore God, Lester, are they all like you?" whispered Boyd, and I knew he meant the Patriots.

"Luckily, no," I answered. "Fear not, friend; the rest are sane."

"Heaven be praised!" he breathed fervently.

Perhaps 'tis useless to say that the banquet came soon to an end after that, and I doubted not that old Peter Langford would send me marching down the walk and out the gate with scant ceremony. Therefore it was with amazement that, half an hour later, I received the message borne to me by a servant as I sat in the smoking-



room watching the card play of a quartet of young bloods who had forgotten the cyclone of the banquet in the fever of gambling. Mr. Langford knew I must be tired, said the servant in his own way, and my room was ready for me.

Knocking the ashes from my pipe, I bade the gamblers a courteous good night, though, in truth, a good morning were more fitting, and followed my guide. The room to which he showed me was on the second floor, one of several opening off a long hall. The interior — but you care naught for that, as it has no bearing on this tale. Let me simply say that 'twas handsomely furnished, with the great bed looking especially inviting to a tired soldier. The servant lighted my candles and then bowed himself from my presence, hoping “dat de bright spirits would stay wif me.” I threw my sword on the bed, and then went to the window. 'Twas a matter of pleasure to me that I found a long veranda on that side of the house, and I was not long in availing myself of the comforts it offered on such a fine midsummer night. Comfortably seated near its rail, I would have given much for a pipe and tobacco, but none had I. The town was dark, except here and there a flickering lantern marking a street corner, but the moon was peeping up over a church tower on the

far side of the town, and it would not be long until Philadelphia would be reclaimed from the darkness.

The party was breaking up, and groups were leaving, singing, laughing, shouting on their way to where the carriages awaited them, a black servant with a sonorous voice standing at the gateway bawling out the calls to the drivers. Indeed, 'twas an animated scene, but, hardy soldier though I was, I was beginning to confess to myself a great weariness, and, returning to the room, I prepared for rest. My clothes I piled on the chair, man fashion; my sword I placed within reach, as years of turmoil and danger had taught me. The servant had spread out on the bed a long, linen nightshirt, and this I donned, confident that the royal arms worked on the collar in scarlet silk would not prevent my sleeping soundly. Then I stretched myself out with a sigh of comfort, and my last conscious moment was filled with the bawling of the negro at the gate.

But peaceful slumber was not to be the portion of Ian Lester that night, though I must have slept at least two hours before I suddenly sat bolt upright, listening and peering about me. Surely I had not entangled the shout of the negro in my dreams!

God, no! My heart almost thumped itself to my teeth as a scream rang through the mansion, a woman's cry of terror. In a trice I had flung the covers from me, and, sword in hand, was shooting back the bolts of my hall door. And now I knew that the trouble was in an adjoining room, for as I sprang into the hallway I heard a man's voice:

"Hush, damn you! Hush! It's a mistake, I tell you!"

There was another scream, which quickly died away in a gurgle. I heard the sounds of a struggle and knew that the fellow was choking the woman into silence. By this time I was at the door, twisting and rattling at the knob, but the bolts were in place on the inside, and I am afraid that I swore terribly. Then I stepped back and flung my weight against the panels. Of a surety, they would have been stout bolts that had withstood that human battering-ram, and these were not equal to task. As a result, I went to my knees on the floor of the room by reason of the force with which I had come through the doorway, but in a moment I was on my feet. As I plunged into the room I saw by the moonlight a man bending over the bed, struggling with the occupant, but as I regained my feet he turned and sprang through the open window on to the veranda.

I was but a short bound behind him, and in time to hear a voice from the shadows below cursing him.

"The next room, you blundering ass!"

I would have sworn that 'twas the voice of the Prince, but I had no time for tone analysis, for the prowler suddenly whirled and faced me.

"I'll kill you, you meddler!" he rasped.

His sword leaped from its sheath, and in a moment we were fighting merrily on the veranda in the moonlight. His face I could not see for a dark mask he wore, but that his eyes were sharp and his wrist supple I soon found. A night-robe is a poor garb for a test of steel, and the uncertain light of the moon, with many shadows, is apt to bring grief to the best of swordsmen, and so I found that 'twas no child's play that lay before me.

Backward and forward we fought without a sound save the harsh clash and ring of steel meeting steel. Once the fellow stepped into a shadow, and then lunged at me so suddenly that he passed my guard and would have run me through had I not had nimble feet and sprung aside, though the blade ripped through my robe and tickled my ribs in the passing. I thought it strange that none of the men of the household came to help me,

though I heard voices behind me in the room from which I had chased the knave. Not that I was faint of heart, but it seemed the natural thing to expect.

The cowardly thrust from the shadows stung me to an anger I had not previously felt, and I went to the attack so furiously that the fellow was soon beaten from his refuge of gloom. Once I heard a sharp gasp as of pain and was certain that I had pinked him, but the play of his blade never faltered. However, I steadily forced him backward across the veranda, and presently I noted with delight that his breathing was becoming labored and his stroke less true. I, myself, was tiring of the struggle, but my hardy life had made me the physical superior of this fellow, who, doubtless, was much given to the wine-cup. With this new inspiration, I pressed him still harder, and though he fought now almost entirely on the defensive, I could not reach him until I resorted to a trick. Feinting a thrust, I caused his blade to drop in guarding, and then, stepping widely to the left at the same moment, I lunged straight at his heart. He was a wary rascal else had I finished him there, but his blade flashed up in time to turn my point from his breast and save himself from a fatal stroke, but the force I had

put into it was too great to be far deflected, and his back-handed parry served but to guide my point to his right shoulder, and there it sank deep. He screamed with pain, and then, suddenly leaping backward, he vaulted over the veranda rail before I could reach him, and I heard him strike the ground heavily.

Now thoroughly determined to have the fellow, I also sprang to the rail, but the distance was too great and I hesitated to take the leap. But the posts were thickly entwined with vines, and, grasping these, I lowered myself to the ground. I remember smiling as I did so at the fright that would result should one of the blacks chance to see that white-robed apparition, a gleaming sword in its teeth, swinging and swaying between heaven and earth. But when I reached the ground the scoundrel had disappeared, and though I stalked about through the grounds like an avenging spirit, searching every shadow, 'twas in vain.

In the rooms above me lights were flashing, and I heard a babel of voices, and now I bethought me 'twas time I sought my chamber and donned fitter clothing for a ramble through house and gardens. But how was I to do this? I liked not the climb up those vines, and 'twere useless to do

so, any way, for I had carefully fastened my window before going to bed, and as for entrance through the lady's chamber — well, hardly.

There was no help for it, so I marched up to the great door and sounded a summons. Then I waited, half-audibly consigning to the warm caresses of the devil the rascal who had caused me to be in such a plight. Presently I saw a servant coming down the hall cautiously, shading a candle with his hand and peering ahead of its light as though anxious to get an early glimpse of an unknown terror. It was evident that the black was already frightened by the uproar above stairs, and so I was prepared for the shriek of terror when he swung open the door and saw before him a spectre in white with tousled hair, bare feet, and naked sword.

The candle fell to the floor, and with another howl the darky turned and plunged back into the dark recesses. I heard the slamming of a door and the slipping of bolts somewhere in the distance and knew that he had barricaded himself, and probably was now on his knees pleading for forgiveness for some pet sin. Snatching up the candle, I did the only thing possible, — marched down the hallway and up the stairs alone. The servant's howl of terror had attracted atten-

tion from above, and when I was half-way up the stairs I heard a rush of feet, and, looking up, saw a fringe of white faces peering down at me from above the landing rail. I had paused to look, but now as I resumed my spectral march upward the faces disappeared and I heard an excited discussion. As I reached the head of the stairs and turned to go down the hall I was startled by a cry of, "Halt!"

The candle blinded me for a moment, but now I saw a man confronting me with levelled pistol, and beyond him, in the dim light of two candles farther down the hall, was a group of men and a few women, the look of fright on their faces evident even in that uncertain light. In truth, I must have been an uncanny sight standing there like an incarnated spirit from another world.

"Who are you?" came the demand.

"Ian Lester, Captain of Continentals," I responded with habitual formality.

There was a half-smothered shriek from the women, and I saw them turn and dart into their rooms. Then the ludicrousness of it all dawned on me, and I leaned against the wall and roared in a paroxysm of laughter.

"'Fore God, you look more like a captain of devils," was the comment of the man with the



pistol, who now lowered the weapon and indulged in a chuckle himself.

“ Well, if the ladies have hidden their eyes from this embarrassing spectacle, I’ll proceed,” I said, and, candle and sword in hand, I marched on through the snickering men to my room, where I threw myself on the bed and again rolled in a seizure of laughter that I was unable to control.

It was near to dawn by this time, and I decided that I might as well dress and investigate the cause and result of the rumpus, so, wiping the laughter tears from my eyes, I rolled off the bed and turned to the chair where I had left my clothes. Then the mirth in my bosom died a sudden death. The chair was there — but the clothes were not. Seizing the candle, I hastily looked the room over, but not a stitch was to be found.

Consumed with rage, I sprang to the door and would have rushed into the hall again had not the sound of feminine voices out there caused me to pause in dismay. I began beating on the door with my clenched fists.

“ Ho, Langford! Langford! Langford, I say!” I bellowed with all the volume anger could give my voice.

Instantly the women hushed, and I pounded the louder.

"Send Peter Langford here instantly!" I shouted.

There was a commotion in the hallway, and a moment later the old Tory opened the door and stuck his head into my room.

"What devil's racket is this?" he demanded, with a show of anger.

I seized him by the shoulders and pulled him inside.

"My clothes!" I demanded. "They have been stolen!"

"Well, I am not responsible. I believe you chased the thief, yourself."

"But not this thief. That rascal came through a window from without. This scoundrel came through the door from within. See, the window of this room is securely fastened!"

He made a show of examining the window catch, and the while my brain was busy. Many things were beginning to become clear to my mind, and they all hinged on the distressing fact that the despatch I carried from Washington for Congress was stolen. It was sewed in the waistband of my short-clothes. Why had this scheming old Tory inveigled me into becoming his guest? Did

he suspect that I carried important papers besides the one I had purposely dropped? Why had the night prowler entered the room adjoining mine? In a flash I remembered hearing him tell the woman that it was a mistake, and I remembered that some one on the ground below had cursed him for a blunderer when we were fighting on the veranda.

*"The next room, you blundering ass!"*

Those were the words. The next room was mine. Had the fellow been sent burgling as a part of a plot to seize my despatches? And had not the theft of my clothes taken place for this purpose by some one within the house while I was crossing steel on the outside with the knave who had blundered? 'Twas all so plain that in my rage I was of a mind to redden my sword with old Langford's blood.

*"You thieving cur!"*

My fingers went to his throat, throttling the cry that rose to his lips, and in a moment I had him on his knees, the lust of death in my heart, but the face of Mistress Gayle seemed to come between us, and my fingers relaxed. Then a realization of my loss swept over me, and I sank into a chair and with my face in my hands sobbed like a boy. The reputation of soldierly

efficiency I had builded up by months of hardship amid scenes of blood was swept away, leaving me disgraced, ruined. Washington had trusted me, and a woman's cry had caused me to forget. I had gone scrambling down vines and wandering barefooted through the grounds like a clown while my enemies quietly possessed themselves of my precious papers.

When I looked up, Langford was standing before me, and the leer on his face quickly stilled my sobs.

"Are all rebels children?" he asked, and it stung me.

"No," I replied, "but it is well my uniform was stolen. I am unworthy it."

"One would suppose the fool's garb were of spun gold to hear your lamentations. Was it, indeed, so valuable?"

It seemed to be a family trait of the Langfords that their thoughts should be writ in their eyes, and now his were snapping with an eagerness that would have warned me had not my brains already resumed their duty of guarding my tongue.

"Valuable? Poof! I was but vexed, and acted childishly. Provided I secure decent garb the thief is welcome to those poor rags."

"But your valuables?"

Again the snapping eyes told their story, and I spread a smile so natural that I flatter myself he was puzzled.

"Were but trifles. One or two gold pieces and some continentals. Disappointment will be the thief's portion."

"It must have been one of the servants. I cannot believe it of my guests, but the blacks are always thieving."

"And in the meantime I am naked, save for this robe which was slitted by that knave's blade."

"I will see that you are provided."

He backed out of the room, evidently fearing that my fingers might again squeeze his gullet, and I sat there in the early dawn disconsolate and half-regretting that I had sprung aside when the thrust had come from the shadow. The confusion in the halls died away for a time, but by the time the sun had peeped in at my window I heard the servants in the yard below me singing bits of quaint songs in subdued tones. There was naught for me to do but wait as patiently as possible, but I am afraid I said some monstrously wicked things during that wait. But at last there was a knock, and a servant entered and laid out on my bed a complete furnishing of clothing.

"Marse Langford say he think dey fit you an' he hope dey please."

"Tell Mr. Langford that I feel under obligations to him for many things — and don't forget to tell him I said *many* things."

Quickly I donned the garments, and then I surveyed myself in the mirror, vain prig that I was, but it had been many days since I had been arrayed in the tucks and finery of a citizen gentleman, and, in truth, the feel of the satins was pleasing. White silk hose, rose-colored short-clothes, with waistcoat and coat of scarlet slashed with creamy trimmings, rich lace at the cuffs and throat, and the powdered wig that accompanied the finery made of me quite a Brummel, it seemed to me.

When the summons came for breakfast I found Langford alone to break bread with me. Why the other men were absent I never knew, but, doubtless, it was all a part of the game being played by this King's man, and I was compelled to admit that he had succeeded so well thus far that he should be given credit for knowing what was best for his own plans. I felt much like a whipped boy, and ate my breakfast almost in silence.

"You will return at three for my letter?" he asked, when, the meal over, I announced my

intention of going out into the city. "I am sure that by that time I will be able to decide as to my answer to Mister Washington. And I will have my servants' quarters searched for your clothing."

As usual, his eyes were as printed pages, and I read in them sly vaunting, for the rascal felt assured of finding something hidden about my clothing. My lips pressed themselves into a straight line, and the hot reply born in my heart did not live to pass them.

The sun was already beating down with great fury when I ran down the front steps, and the day gave evidence of being one of sultriness. As I reached the long promenade leading to the gate I paused, for there before me was Gayle Langford bending over a rose-bush close beside the walk. As she heard my step she looked up, her left arm supporting a great cluster of the magnificent roses, her right hand still clinging to a flower she was about to pluck. Dressed in some stuff that was light and airy and with dainty figures, radiant and fresh and cool-looking was she, and in a moment my cocked hat was sweeping near to the ground as I made my bow.

"Flora among her treasures," I said.

The look of bewilderment that had at first come

to her face vanished in a smile that quite bewildered *me*.

"La, it is, indeed, Captain Lester. The tailor's conceits quite disguise you, but your audacious speech is betrayal."

"God grant that I never be betrayed to an enemy less fair."

A soft flush stole to her cheeks and heightened the color already there. There was but a moment's hesitation, and then she came towards me, hand outstretched, the roses winnowing from her arm and providing a pathway of petals.

"How ungracious of me," she said, her voice low and soft as a flute, "to stand idly playing with words when I should be giving you my hand in gratitude for your gallant rescue."

She laid her dainty hand, all pink and white, like one of her rose petals, in my rough palm, and bending over it, I pressed my lips to the finger tips, the while a great trembling seized me.

"'Twas *you*?" I queried, and my voice must have betrayed the great surprise I felt.

"And you knew it not?"

"Until this moment, no."

I looked into her eyes and saw there a returning flash of her hauteur, with a growing mixture of disappointment.



"Else your blade would have been less ready, perhaps."

"Else had I certainly slain the knave," I responded, and wondered why I had so thrown my soul into the words.

"Though your sword is for any wench who pipes a cry. Doubtless you thought 'twas some lass you had ogled in the ball-room."

"My sword is for the defence of those who need it — my country first; beauty, though Loyalist, next."

She had spoken herself into a position she little relished, and now was plainly hard put for reply. Hence she irrelevantly held up the flowers.

"Are they not beautiful?" she asked.

"Indeed, they are but little less so than those blooming in your cheeks."

"Fie, Captain, I expected something more original from you."

"Truth has but slight originality. It is like a rose. If the rose is beautiful, all men use the same word in complimenting it."

"Will nothing stay your saucy tongue?" she asked, laughing.

"If I stand in your presence, naught but death."

"Then begone, sir, this instant, for I have harked to enough impertinences!" Her eyes

suddenly flashed anger, as a cloud sweeps across the sky, blotting out the sunshine.

"And I have stifled the voice of duty too long to stand thus in the perfume of Tory crinoline."

"Rebel insults!"

"Doubtless you prefer Hessian blandishments!" I retorted, for she had vexed me beyond endurance.

"Sir!" There was a world of scorn in the word.

"A rebel tongue is a thing despised, but a rebel sword is a gift of God — in time of peril!"

I swung my hat in another bow and stalked down the promenade, my head high in the air.

"Captain!"

I marched on.

"Captain Lester!"

There was an appeal in the tone, and I wheeled. She came to me, holding out two roses.

"I — I was ungrateful to forget," she said. "Will you not accept these, the most beautiful of the garden?"

"And I was a knave to remind you, Mistress Langford," I replied, taking the flowers as tenderly as though they would crumble at a rude touch. "I thank you and beg humbly for your forgiveness."

She smiled and turned away.

“ Mistress Gayle! ”

’Twas my call this time, and as she turned I pressed one of the roses to my lips.

“ To our better friendship! ” I cried, and tossed it to her.

It fell to the ground. She hesitated; then, stooping, she picked it up and, thrusting it into her bodice, ran laughing to the house.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CLANG OF A BELL

THE quaint old city was quiet on that midsummer morning, but it was not the quietude of contentment; rather was it the quiet that comes just before the hurricane sweeps down, bringing death and woe, destroying the old and levelling for the erection of the new and better; the quiet of the tiger that, fleeing from the huntsman until driven to desperation, now crouches, with ominous purring, for a spring, ready to become a hunter of the hunter. The tradesmen in their plain, drab cloth, stood in the doorways talking earnestly with those who paused to chat. And 'twas not God's covenants that burdened their tongues, but a king's tyranny and men's rights — or a king's graciousness and rebels' treason — according to what group was talking — for it must be remembered that there were many who sided with George Third and viewed the

Patriots as so many vipers that were stinging the hand that had blessed them.

Would Congress adopt the resolution declaring the Colonies free and independent?

That was the burden of the tongues this humid morning, and many even of those who were ready to strike a blow at England for the sake of securing redress for certain wrongs were of the opinion that a declaration of independence was a step too far, a bit of mad folly that could but result in disaster. Gentlemen in gold-laced hats and carrying gold-headed canes met and pounded the walks with their sticks as they argued, interspersing their discussion with frequent resorts to their gold snuff-boxes. About the market-places the drivers of Conestoga wagons called to one another, and always the discussion was, "Will the delegates sign?"

I was a stranger and was able to overhear but little of the talk, for in those days men were careful who heard their declarations on political subjects. But I cared naught for the idle talk, anyway. The rose on my lapel was giving out a sweet fragrance. I was no longer in buff and blue, and I seemed floating away from war and its horrors.

The little Tory was a beauteous vixen! I

turned my eyes to the great white cover of a Conestoga wagon, and there on its corded sides I saw her face, saucy, wilful, cold, warm and radiant, pleading, freckled, fair and perfect! Did ever a man see so impossible a picture before? But perhaps no one had ever before seen Mistress Langford's face with eyes like mine. Heigho! I know not, but I know that by the time I had reached the inn where I had stopped the night before I was near ready to curse the entire name of Langford. In my room, I tore the flower from my coat and flung it into a corner.

"So be it with all Tories!" I muttered savagely.

Then I straightway walked over to that corner, picked up the rose, and pinned it on my lapel again. Inconsistent dolt, say you? Well, I am but telling you a truthful tale, and 'twould not be truth did I paint myself as a high-headed youngster whose hours were a grand symmetry of consistency.

Boyd had promised to meet me here at ten, and though 'twas past the hour he had not come. I paced the floor in impatience until a tap sounded on the panels.

"Come in!"

The door opened and Boyd paused on the threshold, staring at me.

"I beg pardon, sir. I thought — why, it — well, spit me, if it isn't Captain Lester, after all!"

"Nay, 'tis *Mister* Lester this morning," I said, looking down at my fine clothes rather ruefully.

He came in and closed the door, and then regarded me curiously.

"Satins and lace — and a rose," he said, a question in his eyes rather than in his inflection.

"Yes, I bought the flower in a shop."

Somehow, the lie slipped out of my mouth, for I felt that he would not understand the rose incident. Besides, I was rather nettled at his tone.

"And the clothes?" he asked, point-blank.

For answer I told him the story of the night and how my despatches had been stolen. He dropped into a chair near the open window and was silent for a time.

"Philadelphia is a furnace to-day," he said, at last, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"Aye, and from the crucible will come — what?"

He shook his head slowly. "May God's pity rest on the poor chaps who swelter in the State-house to-day."

"And what of the chaps who shall carry forward what they begin?"

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He turned his eyes to me again, and a doubt was there.

"I had reference to the heat, Lester. But is this Captain of Continentals faltering in the cause?"

"Falter?" I drew myself up to my fullest height, and probably I looked severe, for he had touched me on a tender spot. "Boyd, some day I'll tell you the story of a scar, and —"

I paused and sprang to the window, for at that moment a handsome coach with gilt panels came bowling along, and at its window I saw the face of Gayle Langford. She saw me, bowed, and smiled into my eyes as I leaned far out on the window-sill, and as she bowed I caught sight of a great red rose in her bodice. Then the coach swept on, but I still hung out of the window, watching it until it turned a corner and left me naught but a dust cloud. Then I drew my head in, and found Boyd watching me, a cold smile on his lips. I reddened under his gaze.

"And of a rose?" he asked, a sarcasm in his voice.

"You saw?" I stumbled over the words in my confusion.

He nodded.

"I saw King George's most loyal wench



smile up at you. And I caught the flash of a rose."

"Well, what of it?" I demanded, anger beginning to kindle at his manner.

"What of it, Lester? Nothing — I hope."

"Damn it, man, have done with your flings. What would you say?"

"Easy, my Captain. Let not the heat of the day creep into your brain."

I said nothing, but turned to the window and sat down.

"The rose she wore, Lester, is a rare one. I know something of floriculture and often have inspected Langford's garden. There is but one bush of that variety in all of the Colonies. It is in Langford's garden — *and the rose you wear grew upon it!*"

I had been reared a truth-loving lad, and now the knowledge that I had been trapped in my lie brought confusion to me. I raised my eyes, but dropped them before his steady gaze. My face was hot, not with anger now, but with shame.

"Lester," he cried. "Tell me the truth about this flower!"

"She gave it to me," I replied, humbly.

"Ah!" He caught his breath sharply. "And

your uniform, Lester, and — yes — by God, your despatches? ”

I looked at him then. “ What mean you? ” I asked.

With a quick stride he was at my side, looking down at me, his hands clenched, and when he spoke his voice was hoarse.

“ Mean? I mean that beauty in petticoats has before now ensnared men and wooed from them that which should have been dearer than life. You lied to me about the rose, Lester, but if you have lied about those despatches, 'fore Christ, you must answer to me! ”

Then I understood. 'Twas in his mind that I had sold my honor for this Tory beauty's favor. The accusation shot me through with rage, but even as I came to my feet another thought had stayed my fingers that would have sought his throat.

“ Boyd,” I said, “ those words would mean your death were it not for this, that they prove to me as nothing else could the patriotism that is in your heart. I'll tell you the story of this rose, and as for Mistress Langford, I would not buckle her slipper for her brightest smile. 'Twas but a passing whim that rammed my head like a gander's out of the window a moment ago.”

Whereupon I gave him the details of my tilt in the garden with the girl, and then of my boyhood, and the last cruise of the *Eagle*. When I had finished he was clinging to my hand.

"But, ah, Lester, how often have I seen red lips change the politics of a stalwart man!" he said, concluding his apologies.

"But the Declaration, Boyd? You know more of it than I. Tell me, will they sign?"

His face clouded. "Last night I would have said yes without a pause. But during the night evil influences have been at work. Some of the delegates hesitate, waiting to hear some word from the court of France. Oh, did King Louis but send a whisper of hope!"

"And to-day brings the hour of destiny to a nation," I said, impressed with the solemnity of it all.

At that moment there came a burst of uproarious laughter from the tap-room below.

"Aye, the hour of destiny, but the rabble still carouse."

And then we fell to discussing the business that had brought us together, a consideration as to how Boyd could best serve the American cause, and the decision was that he would return with me to New York and take service with Washing-

ton. But little did I dream of what was to come to pass ere I stood in the Chief's presence.

We descended the stairs and entered the tap-room. It was hazy with tobacco smoke, and grouped about a table in one corner were several scurvy-looking fellows, drunk and beating the table with pewter mugs in accompaniment to a song. The singer's back was to us, but I recognized him as the Prince. Our entrance attracted no attention, and, seating ourselves in another part of the room, we ordered each a mug of ale.

"The Prince seeks genteel company," remarked Boyd.

"He has an object, I'll be bound," I replied, listening to the chatter of the gang.

"Ho, landlord! More ale! More ale!" they cried.

"No!" cried the Prince. "No more babe's milk will we have. A sling of kill-devil give us."

"Long live the Prince!" shouted one, and the mugs were banged furiously on the table to the shouts of "The Prince!" "The Prince!"

We sat with our backs to them, listening in silence, while the publican bustled about and soon had the rum concoction before them, with many bows and smirks.

"I'll give you a toast," said one, evidently of

better education than the rest, though many of the choicest knaves of the day were well reared and learned. "Here's to the Prince and his loving wench, Mistress Langford! May the nectar of her lips be his in the future as in the past!"

"Sit still!"

Boyd hurled the command at me in a whisper and jerked me back into my chair as I started up. The toast was drunk with a yell of laughter, in which the Prince joined.

"Ach, you jolly dogs!" he exclaimed playfully. "You have many eyes that are sharp, I see. I pledge you in return, this: May your lips be always moist with kisses as sweet as those of my adoring Mistress Lang—"

I wrenched free from Boyd and was on my feet.

"Stop, you cur!" I shouted, and the name died on his lips.

"O Lord!" groaned Boyd.

"Ach! And who is this?" cried the Prince, turning to me, fury in his voice.

With a few quick strides I was before him.

"A gentleman, you whelp of a wolf, who would wash your tongue of its dirty lies!"

I raised my ale-mug and dashed the liquor into his face and mouth as he stood gaping at me. His henchmen had recovered from their astonishment

by this time, and my rash act was like to have cost me dear at that moment, for they surged towards me with a howl of sullen rage, and though there was not a sword among them they might have overpowered me and beaten me to death had not Boyd used his wits. Quick as a flash he seized a stool and hurled it into their midst, bowling a couple of the leaders over, and stopping the rush. Then he grabbed a table and whirled it in front of us as a barricade.

"Fair play for all!" he cried, and even in that moment I admired his coolness and quickness of thought.

The Prince, spluttering with fury, was wiping the liquor from his face with one hand, while his dress sword was already gleaming in his right.

"Gott! The rebel Captain it is!" he exclaimed. "Your heart I will dangle on my rapier!"

He made a lunge towards me across the table, but I saved myself by springing back.

"Hold! Your Highness, he is unarmed!" Boyd had seized another stool and was standing with it upraised.

"Then I shall gash him as I please," snarled the German.

"Surely! Murder would suit you best," I retorted.

"But wait and let him fight you on equal terms," Boyd pleaded. "Do not murder him."

"To kill a dog is not murder!"

There was a shout of approval from his followers, and the Prince lunged at me again across the table. Boyd swung at him with the stool, but the German eluded the blow, and before Boyd could recover himself half a dozen hands had clutched the stool and torn it from his grasp. The next instant it came hurtling through the air from the other side of our barricade. A noise in the passageway behind me had caused me to half-turn, and now I saw the flying stool too late to dodge it. There was a fearful whack, I felt as though my head had burst, a million lights streaked with red were before my eyes, I heard some one shouting as though in command, and then the noises trailed off into silence and darkness.

Boyd was bending over me when I opened my eyes some time later in my own room of the inn, and behind him I saw the uniforms of Continental soldiers. I put my hand to my head, which was aching terribly, and found it swathed in bandages.

"Thunder and dragons! Will nothing keep you quiet?" exclaimed Boyd, petulantly, forcing me back on to the pillow as I tried to rise.

"Surely," I replied. "Try a recital,"

"Well, keep your broken pate on the feathers and I'll tell you the very little you don't know. Your head stopped that flying stool, and then they swarmed over the table at us. By now we would have been beaten as black as jerked venison — and as dead — had not a squad popped into the room just then and sent the rascals scurrying."

A sergeant stepped forward from the soldiers and saluted.

"A squad of Wilmoth's horse, sir. Half a regiment is scattered about the town while the Congress debates the Declaration."

"I see," I said, though, in truth, I did not see.

"My squad was at the stables of the Golden Lion when the landlord rushed out and said a Captain of Continentals was likely to be mobbed. That's all, sir."

"Thank heaven that it's enough," I replied, smiling in spite of my throbbing head.

"Can we be of further assistance, sir!" queried the sergeant.

"No, I thank you for what you have done."

I sat up on the side of the bed in spite of Boyd's protests.

"No time for coddling or pillows now," I answered.



"But your head, Lester; your head?"

"Feels big enough to take care of itself," I replied, putting my hands to my temples.

"But the consequences —"

"Will be devilish interesting to that titled knave when I meet him with my blade in hand."

I sprang up, but sat down instantly, with a groan that was wrung from me by the sudden pains that laced my head.

In a trice Boyd was at my side with a cup of water with which he wet my bandages and cooled my tortured head. He had no trouble in getting me stretched out, for I was sick and faint from the torture. For the next few hours I was off my back but little, though I sat up occasionally in an effort to force Nature to grant me the relief I demanded, and never was new-found friend more solicitous than was Boyd during those hours. It was two by the clock when I finally struggled to my feet and swore I was going forth. Boyd argued and begged in vain, for my appointment with Langford was for three, and I was determined to be punctual. And so, after fresh bandages had been wrapped about my head and I had taken a few swallows of wine, we set forth. I noticed that the streets were almost deserted, and remarked it.

"They crowd about the State-house," replied Boyd.

At first my legs felt weak and wabby, and my steps were uncertain, but each minute was bringing me strength, though the afternoon was stifling hot. To avoid the heat we hugged the shade wherever possible, and I must admit that no wench ever leaned more heavily on her gallant's arm than did I on Boyd's. Our way led us past the State-house, and here under leafy locust trees we found a vast crowd assembled, all eyes turned toward the building, all ears strained to catch such sounds of debate as might escape through the open windows. Patriot and Tory were side by side, but it was not a comforting day for the Tory, for the spirit of the hour was beginning to manifest itself more and more in open jeers at the Loyalists. As the hours had dragged along the enthusiasts had grown more and more exasperated, until by now the passions and prejudices were so wrought up that open brawls were imminent.

"The bellman will ring the news if they sign," said one of the watchers as we turned away from the crowd.

At the Langford gate Boyd left me, and I made my way alone up the broad walk to the door. A

black servant was trimming about the rose-bushes, and in an angle of the great house a caged canary was pouring forth its loudest song. I glanced up at the veranda where I had duelled the night before. And that window at the left was hers! I paused with a sudden catch of my breath. Was that the flutter of a handkerchief at the window? No, it was but the ripple of a dainty curtain as the wind slipped in at the open window. I trudged on towards the door, but something had caused the blood to swell my veins until my poor head ached more furiously than ever.

I lifted the great brass knocker and sent a vicious summons thundering. I would get this letter from Langford and turn my back forever on the nest of intrigue. Of a truth, I had made a pretty mess of my mission. What terrible results might come from the loss of my despatches I had no means of guessing, but here I was humiliated and my career ruined because a woman had screamed in the night. Ah! That scream! Could it be that the woman who voiced it was in the plot, feeling sure that I would do just as I did?

After the servant had directed me to the library I dropped into a chair and scowled at a painting on the wall. Was this girl in the plot? I hated

the little vixen with all the intensity of my nature. I knew I did, for ever since that day when I had marched as a wounded boy through Boston's streets I had nourished a grudge against the freckle-faced girl who had thrown pebbles at me. And now it was in her defence that my career had been wrecked beneath her father's roof.

I heard a step in the doorway and turned to see the black face of Erasmus there.

"Beg pahdon, suh; I begs pahdon. I'se lookin' fer —"

"Come in here, Rassel, you link of memory," I cried, springing to my feet.

"De Lord lub us, if 'tain't Marse Ian, an' him a-lookin' like er Tory nabob!"

"And does your present grandness teach you to make remarks about your master's guests?" I demanded, severely.

"No, suh; no, suh," he answered, coming into the room. "I suhtenly begs pahdon agin fer my 'pertinence I'se monstrous gran' hyar, an' I shorely feels bad t' think dat I'se done fergot my manners. But, Marse Ian, what it all mean? I ask ye will ye tell ol' Rassel what become o' Marse Soldier, an' wharfore ye become Marse Silk an' Satin?"

"You don't mean that you haven't heard of my uniform being stolen?"

"I b'lieves I did, suh; I b'lieves I did hear o' somethin' bein' tooken, but I didn't know it was Marse Soldier's clo'es!"

Then I recounted to him the events of the night before, and when I told him of the fight on the veranda and my return in my night-dress, the old fellow tittered.

"Te-he-he! I done hears about dat. Ol' Mammy Sue's Sammy Jim he open de door fer ye, and, Lord, he ain't done shakin' yit, he dat skeert o' de ha'nts. Te-he-he! Dat boy done tol' us dat a yarthquake shook de house an' dat when he open de door dar stood er spook ten feet high wid er sword o' fire an' er robe o' grave clo'es. He said de ha'nt let go er bref an' de house done rattle ergin, an' dat when he run de spirit done chase him an' scorch his wool wif dat sword o' fire. Te-he-he!"

"Well, as soon as old Langford returns I'll be off, and Sammy Jim probably will not see any more spooks," I replied, laughing.

"Ye don' know Sammy Jim, Marse Ian. He gwine ter see ha'nts reg'lar now. Ol' Unc' Fairfax, de voodoo man, he workin' right dis minute on er charm o' rabbit hair an' some other fixin's

fer Sammy Jim what'll gib him power ter see ha'nts wifout no hurt comin' ter him. Yes, suh, he's gwine ter see 'em reg'lar now."

"By the way, Rassel, is the Prince about the house?"

"'Spec' not, suh. Seed him an' Missy Gayle settin' mighty proud like on hosses' backs an' er gallopin' down de street about a hour ergo."

"The Prince doesn't like me very well, Rassel."

I spoke in an unconcerned way, and then smiled at the comical shake of the darky's head.

"Lord, I done 'spicioned dat very thing at de banquet last night."

"Quite a lively affair, eh, Rassel?"

"Don' want no more like it, Marse Ian. I done tol' ye ye'd git stinged in dis hornets' nest, an' I reckon I done tol' ye right. But — he-he-he! haw-haw-haw! — what er screechin' dar was when ye toasted Marse Gin'ral Washington an' de *Eagle*!"

The old fellow placed his hands on his hips and shook with laughter.

"Lord lub ye, Marse Ian," he continued, suddenly growing serious. "When ol' Rassel stood dar an' heerd ye a-raisin' de debbil wid dem Tories, I says ter myself, says I, 'Rassel, dat Marse Soldier suhtenly am little Marse Ian, fer

dey ain't no other boy ever yit growed what'd have such 'dacity.' Ye suhtenly looked monstrous gran' standin' dar jest like dis, wif er glass held way up high, an' er sayin' 'Yere's health ter Gin'ral Washington!' An' let me — "

" Well! "

We both turned to see Peter Langford standing in the library door, his cane planted in front of him, his eyes shooting rage at Erasmus, who immediately began bowing and stammering.

" Since when did you take to toasting this rebel general? " Langford demanded, and then almost in the same breath ordered him to get out of the room.

" You're on time, I see, " he said, turning to me.

" And you are late, I see. "

" Yes, but I have the letter. I've been down to the State-house to see if I could learn what new traitorous action these rebels will take. "

" And the Declaration — will they sign? " I asked, eagerly.

" Sign? Of course not. They're a pack of ingrates, but they are too smart to follow the lead of such scatterbrains as Tom Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and the rest of those cursed Virginians. "

"But mark you, Peter Langford. If the Declaration be not signed to-day it will be held up before the people until sentiment drives the cowardly delegates to put their signatures to it. But I believe 'twill be signed to-day."

The blood swelled the veins in his face and head, and he trembled with rage as he thumped the floor with his stick.

"Bah!" he shrieked. "You young traitor, I'll be present when the crowd of you hang for your treason to King George. They'll not sign until France says the word, and King Louis will never say it."

I walked to the window and looked out. There was not a breath of air stirring now, and the leaves of bush and tree hung limp. Somewhere near at hand a rooster crowed lonesomely, and then there was silence. It was as though the world breathlessly awaited those tracings of ink.

"The old bellman will sound the signal when 'tis done," I said, turning to Langford again.

"Then he'll sound your death-knell; but he'll not ring."

He said something more, but I lost the words. I had heard the beat of hoofs, and glanced out of the window in time to see the Prince handing Gayle Langford to the ground. The next minute



she came flying up the stairway and burst into the room like a shower of pink and white blossoms.

"Papa, they say the Congress —"

This much she had flung off her tongue ere she had time to see me and check herself. Then she paused, embarrassed.

"Oh, you are hurt!" she exclaimed, catching sight of the bandage around my head.

"No, it's just — that is — I mean I tied that around my head as a protection from the heat," I stammered.

I found my hatred of a memory fast dimming. Instead of apologizing for her abrupt interruption, or even greeting me, she had followed Sympathy and given voice to it in her tone and action.

"What's his hurts to you, Gayle?" demanded Langford, angry that her tone had been kind.

"The same as though it were Erasmus," she replied. "I hate the sight of bandages, for they speak of pain, and —"

"Then let us not call this a bandage, but, rather, the white flag of truce."

"Agreed. Sound the 'parley.' You cannot be badly hurt else would you not jest so."

"But what meant you about the Congress?" rasped Langford, and the pretty speech I had on my tongue melted away.

She lashed her skirt with her riding-whip.

"They say the Congress is certain to sign the Declaration!"

"They lie! They'll not do it! It'll mean —"

"War more terrible than ever," interrupted the girl, a note of sadness in her voice.

"It will mean the birth of a nation!" I cried.

Langford turned to his table and snatched up a letter.

"Here!" he shouted. "Here is my reply to that imp of treason, Washington. Out of this house and —"

"*Clang!*"

His voice died in his throat, and his jaw dropped. He stood staring straight ahead, seeing nothing.

"*Clang!*" "*Clang!*"

I turned to the girl. She was deathly pale, and her riding-whip, bent double, was clenched in both hands. She shivered slightly, as though a sudden chill had struck her. Again and again the bell in the State-house sounded on the still afternoon.

"They've signed!" I shouted, and sprang to the window, wild with delight.

The streets were filling with people, cries and shouts were arising from every hand, and soon the bells in other steeples were joining in the

anthem of joy. I heard a gasp and turned to see Langford swaying unsteadily.

"The traitors ! The traitors!" he shrieked, his hands outstretched, and his fingers working convulsively. "They'll hang for this! The King — "

The girl gave a cry as he suddenly sank in a heap to the floor. In an instant we both were at his side, but a look into his purple face told me that he had burst a blood-vessel in his brain in his paroxysm of rage, and it was my judgment that he was beyond aid, but I pounded furiously on a call-bell and sent a servant flying for a doctor.

"He must have a leech!" I said.

## CHAPTER VI

### PROTECTING THE ENEMY

**S**OON the house was in an uproar. Mrs. Langford was absent from home, and the servants ran pell-mell hither and thither, weeping and moaning and doing no good. The Prince came, and hostilities between us were suspended while we carried the dying or dead man, we scarcely knew which, up the stairs to a bed. Outside, the bells were still keeping up their wild clatter, and presently we began hearing the shouts of crowds parading the streets.

“Death to Tories!”

The cry came in at the bedroom window from the street below, and I glanced at the German. His usually ruddy face had paled, and his hand was unsteady as he snatched up a decanter, poured a glass full of wine and gulped it at a swallow. Neither of us spoke. There was a medley of hoots and cries from the streets, and then the disturbers passed on.

The physician came, but a moment told him the story. Peter Langford had died at the moment Liberty was born. The afternoon waned, but I remained in the house at the simple request of Gayle Langford.

"I am so alone," she said, sobbing.

And, indeed, she was, for terror stalked on the streets of Philadelphia that memorable evening. Well it is that historians have failed to chronicle the riotous doings of those hours when many zealous Patriots became so carried away by their enthusiasm that they, hot-headed, followed leaders whose motives were revenge, plunder, anything that such an occasion might offer. These men were knaves who were always ready to break into rioting, and such a time as this was not to be wasted, so that those who had upheld the King found themselves prisoners in their homes, not daring to venture forth to counsel with those whose sympathies were in like channels. And so it was that Gayle Langford found herself so alone with no sympathizing one of her own sex to mingle tears with her in this house of the dead. That Mrs. Langford had sought refuge in some friend's house we doubted not, and did not expect her return ere the morrow.

At early dusk Erasmus was sent forth to learn

## PROTECTING THE ENEMY 113

what was taking place. We were in the drawing-room, the girl, the Prince, and I, when he returned.

“ ‘Fo’ God, Marse Ia — I means Missy Langford — I suhtenly is upset in my mind. Dar’s awful doin’s up town!” The old fellow stood in the middle of the floor and swayed his body from side to side, fright depicted in every line of his face and every tone of his voice. “ Dey’s tearin’ down de statue o’ King Geo’ge an’ er meltin’ it inter bullets wif er big bonfire. An’ all de time dey howlin’, ‘ De Tories say dey sick o’ dis freedom talk. Hyar’s pills what’ll make ‘em well!’ ”

“ Go on, Rassele,” I commanded, as he paused.

He looked at the girl, and she nodded. “ Tell us all,” she said, faintly.

“ Oh, de good God pertect us, dar’s gwine ter be bad doin’s dis night!” he suddenly wailed. Then he turned to me as though with confidence. “ Marse Ian, dey drinkin’ kill-debil, an’ dey don’t pay no ‘tention ter de mens what tries ter make ‘em behave. An’ — oh, de good Lord, Marse Ian — dey fix up an ol’ suit er clo’es stuffed wif straw an’ dey tie er rope about de neck an’ h’ist it up to er tree. ‘ Dat ol’ Pete Langford, de Tory. He gittin’ up in de worl’ mighty fast,’ some one hollers, an’ den dey all laugh.”

I heard a moan, and turned in time to see the

girl sink to the floor in a heap. I looked toward the Prince, but he was striding up and down the room, muttering, "Ach! Gott!" over and over, and paying not the slightest heed to the girl, so I sprang to her side and raised her. Her face was chalk-white, and there was a dry sob in her throat as she struggled to her feet with my assistance.

"I thank you," she said in a broken, strained voice. "It was a sudden weakness, but I am stronger now. Go on, Erasmus."

"I cain't tell no mo', Missy. I stood dar a lookin' an' a listenin' till all to once some one hollered, 'Hyar's ol' Langford's niggah now,' but befo' dey could cotch me, dis ol' niggah he turn an' dodge down er alley an' run fer home jest like er young rabbit."

Then she dismissed him and ordered the candles lighted. An occasional tremor was in her voice and the color was still absent from her cheeks, but I found myself admiring the wonderful pluck of this girl in an hour so fraught with peril and grief to her. She ordered supper served, but old Erasmus returned shortly bearing the intelligence that not a servant could be found about the place.

"Dey's dat skeert dey all done run erway an' hide," he said.

## PROTECTING THE ENEMY 115

But no one cared to eat, so the desertion made but little difference. Darkness deepened, and I would have gone forth to see what the true conditions were, but the girl begged so hard for me to remain that I did so. The shutters were closed and we sat in an up-stairs room, talking but little. In a room on the same floor lay the body of Peter Langford. Hoots and cries came at intervals from the street, and through the cracks of the shutters we could see the ruddy glow of bonfires. The Prince had recovered his composure to some extent.

"Ach! Could King Louis but witness the noble acts of America's Patriots," he sneered.

I know that my face must have gone a-flaming with the taunt, but in the presence of this grief-burdened girl and in the house of the dead I could not treat his insolence as it deserved.

"Could King Louis visit Philadelphia this night he would see not the Patriots, but the evil ones of no politics abroad in deeds of violence. They'll fight in neither army, but plunder both. With the dawn order will be restored."

"But to-night? The sun it shines not yet for some hours!"

"In the meantime, the coward heart that fears the darkness must quake!"



I made no effort to mask the contempt I felt, but turned from him and sank into a chair. The girl had sat unheeding, doubtless unhearing, our exchange. Scarcely had I touched the chair when some one came bounding up the stairs, and I sprang to my feet just as Erasmus came rushing into the room, puffing and blowing.

"Marse Ian! — Missy! — Dey's comin'! Dey's comin'!" he gasped.

"Who is coming? What do you mean?" I asked, as the girl came to her feet.

"O Lord, we'se all gwine ter be hunged! We'se gwine ter be hunged!"

"Speak up, Rassel! What is it?" I demanded, taking him by the shoulder and shaking him in my impatience.

"De mob! I sees 'em comin' wif torches an' er rope. An' I hears 'em say dey gwine ter put tar an' feathers on Marse Langford an' den pull him up by er rope!"

"You heard this, Erasmus?" asked the girl.

"Yassum; I done heered it wif my own ears, Missy! O Lord, I wish't I hadn't."

She wheeled to me, and her eyes were flashing once more with hauteur and anger.

"So!" she exclaimed in a tone that was as metallic as the clash of steel. "This is a sample

## PROTECTING THE ENEMY 117

of what your rebels' policies are bringing to us! Ian Lester, Captain of Continentals, I salute you and compliment you on your gallant following!"

Such a world of scorn was in her voice, her eyes, her proud face with tip-tilted chin, that I dropped my eyes before her.

"For God's sake, Mistress Langford, don't judge us so! 'Tis not our Patriots! 'Tis a rabble such as any city harbors. True, the people are drunk with the thought of independence, but—"

There was a sudden clamor in front of the house and I paused.

"Aye, drunk with the broth of treason that you have helped brew!" she exclaimed. Then she darted to the window and flung open the shutters. "See!" she cried, pointing to where a dozen torches were flaring under the trees. "The wolves seek their kind! Out and join the pack, you rebel!"

To my dying day I'll bear in my mind the picture she made as she stood there in the candle-light, her burning eyes shooting sparks of fire into mine, her arm extended, pointing through the open window to where the half-drunken devils below were approaching the house. The mob also saw the open window and the girl

framed in its light, and a stone thrown by some brute clattered close beside the casing.

"Have a care!" I warned, and sprang to close the shutters.

But her hand clutched mine and jerked my grasp from the shutter.

"Stand back!" she cried. "I'll not hide from such as they!"

Then she impulsively flung the shutters wide open again, and before I could stop her she had leaned far out, her hand uplifted into the night.

"Long live the King!" she shouted.

There was a howl of rage from below, and I seized her roughly about the waist, and by main strength I dragged her back from the window just in time for her to escape the shower of missiles that came from the rioters.

"In God's name, keep away from the window!" I panted, for she was struggling like a wildcat.

"I'll not! I'll not! I despise the cowards! Prince! Help me!"

I glanced about the room, but the German was not there. When he had left or where he had gone I knew not.

"The Prince is not here," I replied, still forcing her away from the window.

She ceased her struggles an instant, glanced

## PROTECTING THE ENEMY 119

about the room, and then suddenly sank into a chair, sobbing.

"God, I am deserted!" she cried hysterically. "Let them come! Let them kill me!" She struggled to her feet again. "Let me die at my window. I am helpless!"

I pushed her back into the chair, and in a moment had the shutters closed again.

"No, no! you are not deserted!" I exclaimed. "'Fore heaven, Mistress Langford, I'll stand between you and them!"

A thundering summons sounded at the front door.

"Rassle!"

"Yes, suh!"

The old darky was standing in the hallway moaning and praying.

"Are the doors fastened?"

"Done bolted 'em all myself, suh. But, O Lord! Dey cain't stand dat!" he added with a wail as a sudden shock announced that the mob was battering at the door.

"Go to where your master lies, Rassle, and do your best to make them respect the dead if they reach there. Go!"

Again the shock came at the door and I knew that the mob would soon batter down the barrier.

"Run to my room and fetch my sword," I said to the girl.

She darted away without a word, and I ran down the stairs.

"What do you want?" I demanded, loudly.

"Pete Langford, and we're goin' to have him, too!" came the response, at which there was a yell of approval, and a chorus of cries of "Death to Tories!"

"Peter Langford has gone!" I cried.

"Gone where?"

"To another world. He is dead!"

A mocking laugh came to me through the panels.

"You're a liar! The old fox is hidin', but we'll drag him out in a minute!"

Crash! Crash! A battering-ram was splintering the door, and already I could see the light of their torches through the shattered panels.

"You'll rot in prison for this!" I yelled.

Crash! Crash! Crash! The door was giving away, and I wisely retreated up the stairs. As I reached the top I heard a final crash and through the doorway poured the mob.

"Halt!"

I raised my hand threateningly, and the pack

## PROTECTING THE ENEMY 121

of human wolves paused a moment. Gayle Langford came flying down the hallway.

"Quick! My sword!" I whispered, turning to her.

"It's gone!" she replied, a sob of despair in her voice.

"Gone? God help us!" I groaned.

"Damn the Tory dandy!" shouted one of the pack. "After him and —"

"A moment! Death is here!" I cried, trying to gain time, I knew not exactly what for. "Quick, make your escape!" I added, turning to the girl.

Her chin went up in her proud way.

"I stay with you," she said, and stepped closer.

"There's a devilish pretty girl there, too," came from below.

"You hound! You'll never live to touch her!" I flung back at him.

All of the fighting blood within me had begun firing my brain by now, and I was ready to struggle and bleed and die laughing if I could batter the life from the bodies of some of those below me.

"And who are you, my lace-cuffed fashion-plate?"

I parted my lips to reply, but the sound died on my tongue as a voice behind me spoke:

"I'll tell you who he is."

I turned, and gasped in astonishment, for there stood the Prince arrayed in my uniform and with my blade at his side. An inarticulate sound came from the girl's lips, and I choked back a flood of curses.

"Lovers of liberty, listen to me," said the Prince. "I am Ian Lester, Captain of Continentals, and here stands one you seek — a Tory spy!"

The girl sprang forward.

"It's a lie!" she screamed.

Half blind with fury, I sprang at the German, without a word, and before he could evade my unexpected move I had him by the throat. He half-drew the sword, but, realizing its uselessness in such a close combat, he released the hilt and tried to tear my hands from his throat. The knaves below made a rush up the stairs, but when they were half-way up I exerted all my strength in one sudden twist, and, lifting the Prince off his feet, flung him headlong down the stairs. He clutched for support, but missed, and then went plunging into those crowding the stairs, bowling three or four of them over like tenpins, and forming a squirming, cursing human barricade in front of the rest.

I was for following the Prince and fighting it



LIFTING THE PRINCE OFF HIS FEET, I FLUNG HIM HEADLONG  
DOWN THE STAIRS. — *Page 122.*





## PROTECTING THE ENEMY 123

out on the stairway, but as my descending foot touched the top step a soft hand clutched my arm, and Gayle Langford spoke into my ear:

"Come, follow me. Quick! It's hopeless here!"

In a flash reason returned and showed me she was right. I did as bidden, and, holding me by the hand as though I were a child, she sped back the hallway and turned down another and darker one, while behind us we could hear pandemonium on the stairway as the fallen ones struggled to free themselves. Suddenly the girl paused, fumbled at a door-knob, and then led me into a room. She released my hand and in an instant I had shot the bolts into place.

"Listen!" she said.

Above the racket we could hear a voice shouting:

"After him! Hang the dog of a spy!"

"The Prince!" whispered the girl, and a note of disgust was in her voice.

"They'll hunt us out in a few minutes," I said. "What have we for defence?"

"Nothing. We must run away. They will kill you!"

"It's hateful — that word, 'run,' but there's no help for it. And you will go with me?"

"Do you think I dare stay?"

"No — no. But — but the charge that Erasmus guards?"

There was a brief pause. "The dead are at rest forever," she said, her voice low.

As she spoke she groped across the room to a window and opened the heavy shutters. Behind us we could hear confusion in the hallways and many voices shouting divers things.

"This is our only chance," she said, as I reached her side.

I looked out. It was a sheer drop of thirty feet to the ground, and not a vine to which we could cling in descending.

"It's no use," I said. "I had better make a fight. A jump means broken bones."

"And to fight means death to you — and — and worse for me from those brutes!"

"Yes — you're right! And they're coming! I'll go first and catch you!"

We could hear them streaming down the hall, cursing as they searched first one room and then another.

"A rope for the spy and lovin' arms for the Tory wench," bellowed one.

It was the last threat rather than fear of the rope that put my feet on the window-sill, and I was slipping over the edge, teeth hard set for

## PROTECTING THE ENEMY 125

the fall, when I felt her hand on my arm once more.

"Wait! Come back!" she whispered eagerly, and as I paused I saw her seize her broad sash, undo the knot with a jerk, and the next moment she had unwound it from about her waist and was holding it towards me.

"A rope!" she exclaimed.

I clutched the sash and felt of its texture.

"It will never hold unless doubled — and then it will be far too short."

I am sure I groaned, for hope had flared high in my breast, and now its ashes were choking me.

"Have you nothing else?" I asked.

"Nothing — unless — unless — Turn your back, sir!" she suddenly commanded.

I did as I was bidden, and at the same instant I heard the swish of feminine draperies.

"Here, take this! No — don't look at me," she cried, and then I found myself clutching the long wrapper she had worn. I know I acted like a dunce, for I stood there without action, and she stamped her foot in a justifiable fury of impatience.

"Don't stand and stare! Tie the arms to this doubled sash, and the sash to this table."

A step in the hall near our door aroused me, and in a trice I had obeyed the orders of my fair

commander. The table was dragged to the window, and with the improvised rope in my hands I was once more on the sill just as a rough hand grasped the knob.

"Ha! A bolted door! Ho! This way! We'll find our game in here!" roared a voice, and I heard them coming. There was a smothered moan from somewhere in the darkness of the room where the girl was crouching.

"When the sash slacks, follow me quickly!" I said, and slid down into space.

I felt the flimsy stuff stretch and give beneath my weight, and I expected each breath that it would break, but I was nimble and soon found myself at the end. I cast one look towards the ground, but it lay in shadow and I knew not how far away. There was no time for speculation, for I could hear the door above being battered. I set my teeth and dropped. I must have fallen ten feet, and the drop near knocked the breath from my body. Then as I scrambled to my feet and looked up I heard the door splintering and saw the dull gleam of the torches shining into the room. And then — ! I caught my breath, for there in the window, in clinging garments of white, was a slight figure sharply outlined by the dull glow.

## *PROTECTING THE ENEMY* 127

"Come!" I cried.

"Don't you dare look!" she replied, the eternal feminine mastering her even in that moment of peril.

Obediently I dropped my eyes for the instant, but her danger was too great, and I looked up to see her swaying in mid-air like a nymph from another world. The torches' glow became a glare and I knew the mob had broken into the room.

"Hurry! I'll catch you!" I called to her, and braced myself with my eyes glued on the swaying figure.

"Hell and furies, the window!" shouted some one from above, and a face peered out. The girl, descending slowly, was still far from the end of the wrapper-rope.

"Ha! There's a nibble at the line! We'll land one of the fish yet," came the shout.

The knave seized the sash, and, calling for help, began tugging at it in an endeavor to pull the girl back into the room. Then of a sudden I heard a tear, the wrapper parted, and with a half-scream Gayle Langford plunged down to my waiting arms. I saw the fellow at the window stagger back as the resistance ceased, and then a human thunderbolt landed in my arms and I went down under the shock. For a moment I

lay dazed and gasping, my face to the sky, and then I became conscious of a dead weight lying across my chest. I put out one hand and it rested on a mass of dishevelled hair.

"Are you hurt?" I asked eagerly.

There was no reply. The girl lay quite still, and a terrible fear pierced me. Had her neck been broken by the fall? Rolling her gently from me to the grass, I felt for her pulse, but in my eagerness I clasped the slender wrist everywhere but in the right spot, and finally, with a feeling of transgression, I placed my hand over her heart, but her stays foiled me. Whether or not there was a pulsation beyond that armament I knew not, and no time was left me to ponder, for a flaring torch was poked out of the window above.

"Here they are!"

The report of a pistol echoed the words, and I felt the wind of the bullet as it zipped close to my ear.

To hesitate was to invite death. I picked the girl up in my arms and ran as well as I could. The night had grown intensely dark, a storm was gathering, and already I could hear the muttering thunder, rolling nearer and nearer. As I plunged into the darkness of the small park in the rear of the mansion I came near colliding with a tree,

## PROTECTING THE ENEMY 129

and this taught me caution. Not a sign of life came from my burden, whose slight form hung limp. That it probably would be but a few minutes until the pack would be after us I doubted not. Perhaps for my life they cared little, but the girl? For her — !

I heard the splash of water near, and, threading my way among the trees, came to a small fountain. Laying the girl down, I dashed handfuls of the water into her face, and soon had the delight of hearing her draw a deep breath. After all, she had been but stunned by the fall. Another dash of water, and she sat up.

"I — I fell, did I not?" she asked in such a serious vein that I laughed outright.

"I think you did," I replied.

Then her scattered wits returned, and she came to her feet, a white apparition in the gloom.

"But how came I here? I could not walk!"

I detected a note in her voice that made me stammer in an effort to invent a lie.

"Hold your tongue!" she said sharply. "You must have carried me. I — was in — your arms!"

"It was necessary, believe me," I replied, humbly.

A flash of lightning came and she shrank back in embarrassment.



"Turn your back, sir!" she commanded.  
"Where is my — my wrapper? It fell with me."

Inwardly I cursed myself for a blundering, thoughtless dolt. I had forgotten it, and when I blurted out this statement, she began to sob.

"Don't!" I implored. "Wait here, and, 'fore God, I'll go back after the gown!"

I was already turning towards the house when she stopped me.

"No, no! I'm a heartless, o'ermodest wretch. I'm sorry for what I said, Captain Lester. We must leave here at once — but — you go first, won't you? I'll follow and direct."

I jerked off my long, swallow-tailed coat and handed it to her.

"Wrap this about you. It will help protect you."

She hesitated a moment, and then slipped the garment on, with a sweet word of thanks.

A moment longer we stood discussing our predicament. Where should we go? In the wild riots of that night, which, as I have said, history has kindly ignored, there was not where for us to turn for shelter. Her Tory friends undoubtedly were besieged or barricaded as we had been, and there would be small chance of our gaining admittance into any Patriot homes.

## PROTECTING THE ENEMY 131

Shouts and the light of torches near the building cut short our deliberations and sent us scurrying through the park, the girl shrinking from the main streets because of her scant attire, and I, myself, being a strange sight, coatless, hatless, and with a bandage about my head.

Down dark side streets we hurried, often being compelled to dodge down alleyways and across open lots by sudden clamors in front of us. My reckless nature rebelled at this running and skulking, but when I objected she washed my opposition away with tears and a declaration that she was near to dying with shame as it was, and to come into light places with a staring crowd about her would surely kill her. And so we dodged, and ran, and hid, this way and that, I in the lead always, until I swore that my shame was becoming greater than hers. At last we darted down a dark avenue, and in a few moments we found our further progress blocked by a small river.

"The Schuylkill," she said. "O dear, I must have become confused."

Not far away a crowd of revellers began singing a ribald song. I could hear the girl gasp.

"Oh, they are coming towards the river!" she cried.

"Well, shall we jump in and swim?" I asked, as sarcastically as I could. "Or will you let me fight a way through them?"

"No, no, no! Let's not let them see us. Maybe there is a boat some place near. Look quickly. There must be a boat!"

I walked slowly along the river bank, not heeding her imploring cries to hurry. In truth, I was sick of this running away, and was hungering for a fight. My spirit demanded it as the only means of restoring my self-respect to its throne. Suddenly I heard her footsteps, and, looking around, I saw the dull outline of her white skirts below my coat moving along the bank, and knew that she was also searching. With a wicked grin, I stopped, with my hands on my hips, and began whistling a gay tune.

"You wretch!" she cried. "I'll never forgive — Oh, Heaven be praised! Here is a boat! I knew I could find one."

"Good fairy princess, can you not wave your wand again and materialize some giant stork on whose back we can fly to safety from a few drunken clowns?"

I heard the rattle of a chain, and knew she was trying to handle the boat.

"Come and help me, please," she implored.

## *PROTECTING THE ENEMY* 133

"There is really no hurry," I responded, tantalizingly, and listening to the approach of the roisterers, to whom, doubtless, the boat belonged.

No word came in reply, but I saw a sudden collapse of something in white, and prostrate on the river's bank I heard her crying.

Heigho! The magic of a woman's tears! They sent me to her; they raised her from the sod; they swung the boat from the bank into the stream; they bent my back to the pull of the oars while she sat in a wretched heap in the stern; they robbed me of the lust for combat, and when we heard the men shouting and cursing as they searched for their boat, and I saw her cower down into the seat, a thrill of pleasure came to my heart because I had yielded to her tears and had fled from insult to her.

## CHAPTER VII

### WANDERERS

**T**HE thunder of the approaching storm still growled, and an occasional flash of lightning lighted up the heavens and made the water look blacker than ever. For a long time not a word was spoken by either of us. There were but few craft on the river that night, and I had but little trouble in avoiding them. We could still see the glare of bonfires up in the city, and ever and anon could hear the cries of the crowds that paraded the streets.

"Where are we going?" asked the girl, presently.

"Taking an excursion into the Unknown Somewhere," I replied lightly.

In truth, I had no idea where our voyage would end, but I began to realize more and more that it would not do to land in Philadelphia that night, for there was not where to take the girl.

It would profit me nothing to fight. The insult to her in her scant attire would not be hushed, and, besides, I was only one and they were many.

And so I bent to the oars, an anxious eye on the approaching storm. The lights of the city slowly winked away and we found ourselves in the stillness of the open country. A few drops of rain fell, and my spirits did likewise. What was I to do with the maid, afloat in an open boat in a rain-storm? Of a surety, the exposure would kill her. Rough, hardened soldier, the storm meant nothing to me, but Gayle Langford was tender reared.

The wind freshened, and then, close on a clap of thunder that seemed to crack the rugged hills, came a dash of rain.

"Look!" she suddenly cried.

I saw her outstretched hand in the darkness, and turned my head, the next lightning flash showing me an overhanging cliff on the left bank.

"We can shelter there!"

I wasted no word in reply, but with a terrific straining at the oars sent the boat shooting under the crags, where, as the storm was blowing from the southwest, we were completely sheltered.

"The fairy princess once more," I said.

"Oh, the horror of it all!" she replied.

The wind had risen and was whipping the little river into froth, while the rain came down in torrents.

"Poor girl!"

My tone must have been heavy with compassion, for it stiffened my companion's courage.

"But think of yourself, Captain Lester. Was ever soldier so ensnared by the woes of a miserable woman?"

"I would be unworthy the name of soldier did a pang of regret rest in my heart for whatever I have been able to do for you."

"And sometimes I have been horrid, but I — really — I have been so spoiled, Captain."

Her tone was so humble that I smiled, aware that the darkness would hide it.

"A night in this boat beneath these crags will be sufficient penance," I replied.

"I am quite comfortable."

"You mean you will not complain. It is brave of you."

"No! No! Don't say that! You forget I made you run like a coward."

"I know now that it was best. I could not have saved you from insult."

"But you could have saved your pride."

"Pride? I had it once, but lost it with my

des — with my uniform." I had come near to uttering the word.

I used the oars gently, just enough to maintain our position and keep the boat from going from under the crags with the current. She was silent a long time.

"In either instance," she said at last, "'twas lost in my defence."

Then her grief at her father's death swept over her and she cried aloud in the agony of her sorrow. And I, great hulking fellow, sat there but a few feet distant and did nothing but paddle with the oars. I tried to think of something to say, but could not. I wonder if I ought to admit that I longed to take her in my arms and comfort her, for I felt that with her ears close to my lips I could whisper something, I knew not just what, but something with the magic of solace in it. In my mental turmoil I gave the oars a vicious pull that sent the boat flying out into midstream.

"Oh-h-h!" she gasped.

The rain dashed into my face and brought me to my senses.

"Idiot!" I said to myself, pulling back to shelter.

Then I found my tongue and by eloquently outraging my conscience succeeded in convincing



her that the rioters would respect the dead, an assurance I did not feel at all.

But 'tis a miserable tale, the story of that night. I sat at the oars during the long hours, keeping the boat under the sheltering cliffs, and the girl sobbed herself to exhaustion, and, huddled down in the boat's stern, fell asleep. In my weary vigil I had but my own rioting thoughts for company, and gloomy entertainment they furnished.

I thought of Washington. Somewhere off to the east the Chief was planning for the cause of liberty, full confident that the young captain he had sent as a courier to Congress would do his duty. And had I done it? The girl murmured something in her uneasy slumber and I stared at her in the darkness and storm. God knows I loved my country! On more than one occasion had I dived with death in serving the cause. But what quality of patriotism was it that demanded of me that I ignore suffering womanhood in devotion to a political principle?

With the waning of the night the storm lessened gradually, finally rolling itself away to the eastward, followed by a rear-guard of spiteful lightning flashes. The clouds hung heavy, though, and there was no rosy flush in the dawn, but, instead,

it came dull and sullen, as though night had turned a gray pallor. In the boat's stern the girl still slept in her weariness. Her bronze hair was tumbled about her face, but it gave to it an added charm. From her closed eyes a tear had escaped and lay close to the end of the long lashes. A flood of pity for her, bereaved and thrown on the rough mercies of a strange soldier, — aye, a rebel, — came to me as I gazed at her huddled there beneath my coat. But of a sudden her eyes opened and trapped my stare full on her face, and a wave of red mounted slowly from her throat to her brow.

“ I crave a pardon; I but pity you! ” I cried.

She drew the coat closer about her.

“ What right have I to resent a stare? ” she asked, slowly.

“ The right of a queen! ” I exclaimed.

“ Then I also have the power to pardon — and I do so.”

A sad smile accompanied the words, and I turned to my oars as a relief from embarrassment.

“ What now, Captain? ”

“ Up the river, I suppose. What is your wish? ”

“ Whatever is best. But we cannot spend our lives in this boat.”

“ Alas, no! ”

'Twas a rash slip of my unruly tongue, and, as I saw the hauteur leap into her eyes, with a jerk of the oars I sent the boat out into the stream. The scene was a dreary one. Stretching back from the river, now muddy and swollen from the night's rain, the hills lay sodden in the mists of the gray morning; from an old log, half-submerged, a monster turtle slid into the river as I rowed past, and from off in the woodlands came the morning chorus of birdland. For an hour we voyaged with slight conversation. The little Tory sat bundled to the chin in my coat, but below it fluffed an expanse of white skirt much too short to conceal a goodly bit of bewitching ankle in gay hosiery, and with dainty feet encased in slippers of red.

"Will milady order her breakfast?" I asked, jocularly, striving to dispel the gloom.

"I think I will order a tale of adventure." Her eyes were on me in a curious way.

"And tell it yourself?" I queried.

"Nay, I am curious for a better one. Captain, that scar!"

She leaned forward and pointed to my forehead, the wind having blown my hair back unnoticed by me.

"I fear you will not enjoy it."

"But my woman's curiosity will torture me." She smiled at her words.

"'Twill be a tale of blood — and death; a story of a boy who became a man in a night of storm and a morning of horror; of a boy who walked, wounded, between British soldiers ahead of his father's body; a tale of a little girl who stood on Boston's streets and threw pebbles at the boy. It will —"

"Don't! Don't!" she cried.

As I had proceeded I saw doubt, realization, sorrow, replacing each other in her eyes, and then she stretched out her hands to me imploringly as the flood-gates of memory opened.

"You were on the *Eagle*?"

"I received that scar on her deck."

"And I — I — scourged you."

"You were far too young to be responsible."

"But I cried when I saw them carrying your father's body."

"I know it. It has softened a memory I have hated."

She looked at me, a sudden alarm showing in her eyes.

"And I am in your power now!" she exclaimed.

"Such power as I have — yes."

"And you —"

"Will spend the last vestige of that weak power in your defence."

Again she was silent for a long time, and I was in no mood to speak. Her next words were of her home, her father, her mother. Could Erasmus protect the dead? Not once did the Prince's name pass her lips. I comforted her as best I could, telling her that as soon as an inviting spot was found we would land and seek shelter at some farmhouse, and that, doubtless, some way could be found to send her back to the city. And so I pulled away more lustily than ever, and finally the sun broke through the gray cloud banks, and the world again wore a smile, though the added warmth soon brought the perspiration to my brow.

"We must be near Valley Forge," said the girl.

I made no reply, but scanned the shores closely for some place of landing. The excitement of the night, and its exertions, had caused my bruised head to hurt terribly. Pains darted from temple to temple, and once I seemed sinking into a stupor, and was aroused by her sharp cry just in time to avoid splitting the boat on a jagged rock that rose from the river's bed.

"Your face is very white," she said. "Are you ill?"

"I am afraid I am — a little," I admitted.

"Then let me row."

"No! No!"

I shook my head as though to clear it of its agonies, and pulled more desperately than before, but it was not for long. Things became confused; I dropped an oar, and it was only her quick clutch that saved it from being swept away.

"You must let me row. I have been on the river often."

Weak and half-blind with suffering, I obeyed like a child and crawled on hands and knees to the boat's stern, where I lay exhausted, but once I roused slightly and saw Gayle Langford bending to the oars, her copperish hair glinting in the morning sun, my coat falling open and disclosing a snowy neck and bare shoulder. Then I must have fainted, for I remember nothing more until a scrape on the boat's bottom aroused me and I saw her stepping ashore, the chain in hand. I staggered to my feet, but the boat rocked, I lost my balance and in an instant was in the river, her scream sounding in my ears as I went down. But the water spurred my energies and cleared my brain for a time, and as it was but a

few feet in depth there, I quickly recovered myself and waded ashore, where I stood dripping before her.

"The plunge did me good," I said.

"There is a house just around that hill," she replied, pointing. "I saw it from the river's bend, but this was the only place I could find a landing."

We fastened the boat chain to a sapling and trudged away in search of shelter, but my strength, which had been rallied by my plunge into the river, rapidly deserted me, and as we walked I found my footsteps growing unsteady. Once I stumbled and would have fallen had she not clutched me by the shoulder. Her exclamation of alarm again goaded my flagging powers, and as I drew myself erect and stepped out with a great show of firmness I tried to laugh away my stumble as a bit of awkwardness.

"We will soon reach the house," she said, and the trembling note in her voice, together with the uneasiness in her eyes as she looked into my face told me that I could not deceive her. In truth, had I but known it, the looks of me were enough to bring cheer to the heart of an undertaker.

"This hill is very steep," I mumbled. In

after days I walked the same path again and found that 'twas almost level.

"Ah, the house!" she cried, and ahead of us I could see a white building of some kind, though the outlines were confused.

My feet seemed leaden, but I felt her hand suddenly seize my arm and I was conscious that I was being sustained and guided. I knew when we passed a gate, and again I summoned every ounce of my strength to clear my befogged brain. In the shade of a fruit-tree I saw a girl seated at a spinning-wheel, her back towards us, the whirr of the wheel and the song she was softly humming preventing her from noting our approach until we were close behind her, when a stumble on my part attracted her attention. She sprang to her feet with a cry of alarm, and then stood staring at us, in her face a mixture of fear and amazement that was evident to even my blurred senses.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

I tried to bow, and would have fallen had not Gayle Langford's grasp again saved me.

"I beg that you be not alarmed," I said.  
"We are —"

Then I paused, for a great question had projected itself into my poor head. Who were we? In those troublesome times of bitterest hate 'twas



most important who you were — or claimed to be. I glanced at my companion. Bareheaded and with her copperish hair tumbled wretchedly about her ears, with my brilliant coat wrapped closely about her, but allowing a tiny expanse of white skirt to peep out beneath, she stood looking mutely at me, and I could see that she, too, had forgotten to prepare for such a query. And I realized that my own appearance must weigh heavily against us. Minus my coat, with my head bandaged, and wet from crown to toe, I was not a spectacle to be welcomed by any lady.

"In humanity's scale, fellow sufferers," I replied.

"But why came you here, and in such a plight?"

"I crave shelter and protection for the lady. For myself I only ask permission to lie in the shade of one of your trees and rest until I am stronger. We are" — a blindness seized me — "victims" — I felt my body swaying — "of a rabble — a rabble —"

I was conscious that the ground seemed rising up in front of me, and I felt a pair of arms clasped about me. Then came a blank.

When next consciousness returned to me it

was as though my senses were rushing towards me through some narrow channel; a roaring was in my ears, growing louder and louder, until it suddenly calmed, leaving me in a realm of sweet peace. I felt a soft touch on my forehead, changing quickly to each temple; my eyelids seemed weighted, but I forced them up and then found myself looking at a vision in white, a girl of, probably, twenty, with a complexion like the glint of old wine, and with raven hair. A candle was burning on the table behind her, its soft light framing her as in a halo, a picture I never forgot. I was lying in a bed; the comfort of fresh, clean linen was all about me. I spoke no word, but stared up into her face, and was conscious of a pleasure in the fact that my vision was not blurred. She looked at me a moment, a slight tinge of red showing in her cheeks; then she smiled, and the room became brighter.

"Your eyes are clear. You will live," she said.

"Nay. Surely must I have already passed away — else how could I be here in heaven?"

I saw the smile leave her lips.

"Hush! 'Tis sacrilegious." But the brilliance of her eyes deepened.

"I meant no mockery. But — ?" I paused and let my gaze wander here and there, over the

bed, about the room, and finally to her. She read the question in my eyes.

"The chore-boy helped us carry you in after you fainted, and he put you to bed while we prepared the few simple remedies possible. You have been delirious much of the day."

"And did I babble?"

She smiled again. "Yes — mostly about an eagle and some little girl who threw stones at you. Boyhood scenes, probably."

The *Eagle*! A little girl who threw stones at me!

"Yes," I replied, "an incident of my youth where a boy died."

"I thought it must have some sad history. Your sister cried whenever you raved about it."

I looked at her a little stupidly. "My sister?"

"Why, yes, do you not remember that you came together?"

Understanding crept slowly into my mind. Gayle Langford had claimed me as her brother, and the reason was plain. 'Twas the safest refuge for her in view of her scant attire and the evident fact that we had spent the night together.

"Yes — yes — of course. My brain is not quite clear yet, and — I — forgot for a moment."

"But no more talking. You must rest. I am going now."

She turned towards the door.

"I will surely perish from curiosity if you leave me alone now," I said.

She smiled and the room grew brighter again.

"Your sister was right, I see."

Not having the faintest idea what my sister had said, it was clearly impossible for me to do aught but keep silent. She added:

"She said that so long as you held consciousness nothing could daunt you."

Oho! The maid had been complimenting me! I felt my pulse quicken, but as I was revelling in the glory of the eyes in front of me, I could not have told to save my battered head whether the glow within me was born of the absent one's compliments or the present one's glances. Fickle weakling, say you? Well, have your fling and welcome, but let me but plead this, that we of the army had found scant time in many weary months to accustom ourselves to the petticoat world.

"Sister" (I almost strangled on the word) "always was o'erproud of her brother."

The ludicrousness sent me into a violent fit of coughing to cover my desire to roar with laughter.

"Perhaps," she said, moving over to the table

and making a fine pretence of busying herself with the candle. "It's a way most sisters have."

"Do they? I have always wished I had a sister," I replied, with all of the brilliancy of an idiot.

She glanced at me quickly, but before she could speak I was floundering in an effort to extricate myself from my blunder.

"I mean," I stammered, "that I've always wished I could be *near* my sister. You see, a soldier is very much alone as regards family ties."

"Yes, my brother — " She paused.

"Your brother — well? "

"Is a soldier, too."

The speech bore a note of defiance, and her head was thrown back with an air of pride.

"Indeed? Then he and I are brothers."

"My brother wears a uniform."

There was no mistaking the biting suggestiveness of the fling, and I felt my cheeks burn.

"What command?" I asked, ignoring her thrust.

"Wilmoth's horse. Perhaps you have met them? "

"Aye, that I have — else I would not be here."

"I suspicioned something of the kind," she replied, and the sarcasm of her tone nettled me.

"Think you I am fleeing from them? Why, they saved my worthless life!"

"Ah?"

"But tell me, where is my — my sister?"

"I left her asleep. I will call her now."

"No, — no, don't!" I cried as she turned towards the door again. "May I ask with whom I have been fencing with words? We have not yet been presented, you know."

"My name? Certainly. It is Mary Wilmoth. And yours?"

The query came like the crack of a whip. Dolt that I was, not to have foreseen it.

"Why, my sister certainly gave you that. Thank you for telling me yours. I really feel that I must rest now."

But she was not to be tricked. Her eyes were on me steadily.

"Perhaps I did not clearly understand the name when she gave it to me."

I looked toward the door, praying that Gayle Langford might step into the room. What name had she given? Was I a Langford? Was she a Lester? Were we both some one else? I had no way of telling, and there stood the girl awaiting

my reply, a reply that, doubtless, would uncover the deceit that had been undertaken with the best intentions possible, and, in uncovering it, would plunge us deeper than ever into the murk of foul suspicion.

"The poor girl herself was about done up. My name? Ian Lester."

One chance was as likely to be right as another, so I clung to my own name. I was watching her closely, and I saw her lips tighten.

"Then I really did misunderstand your — sister."

There was such a depth of meaning to that slight pause, such a sting to the unuttered accusation that I groaned aloud.

"Are you suffering?" There was no warmth to the query.

"Yes — my — head is hurting me." I closed my eyes to avoid hers.

"Possibly it is your conscience."

I opened my eyes and looked again into her face, and it seemed to me that as she stood there she was a marble statue of accusation. I could feel the scorn of her eyes piercing me.

"Accept my surrender," I said, gloomily.

"Then you are not Ian Lester?"

"Yes — Captain in the Continental army."

"And — and — that — woman?"

"That lady is Mistress Gayle Langford, of Philadelphia, loyal to the King."

"But she said —"

"And so would you under like circumstances to avert suspicion where guilt did not exist, for there is no harsher nor more unjust judge of woman than woman."

I could see her eyes soften a little at my speech, and once she parted her lips to speak, but did not. She walked to the door, hesitated, and then turned to me.

"I will send my mother to you. I have already remained too long."

She passed out and I heard her footsteps descending the stairs. The pains were lacing my head again, and I moistened my parched lips with my tongue. Then of a sudden I flung the covering from me, dropped my feet over the edge, raised myself, and sat down on the side of the bed. My clothing was hung across a chair near by and I rose to my feet, but a giddiness overcame me and I plunged forward to my knees on the floor. The fall served only to increase my determination to conquer my weakness, so I crawled to the chair and, clinging to it, gained my feet, and then slowly and with much unsteadiness



ness I donned my clothes, even to the coat, which Gayle Langford doubtless had no further use for now that she was again with those of her sex. By the time I was dressed I was nigh exhausted, but managed to reach the open window, where I clung to the frame and sought strength of the soft breezes of the night.

What was I about to do? I scarcely knew. The headstrong impulses that so often controlled me were in command again. I was stung by the position in which I found myself. I had ruined my military career by springing to the defence of a woman who screamed; I had suffered a broken head in defending this same woman's name; I had endured exposure and fatigue and risked death in caring for her — for a woman who hated me for being a rebel against her King. And now another woman had humbled me and lashed me with suspicion. As I leaned against the window-casing I dimly remember cursing the entire sex. I longed to be astride a horse, clothed in the uniform of American liberty. I put one trembling hand to my forehead and felt of the jagged scar beneath my forelock, and at the feel of it my blood leaped again and my brain cleared. To feel the quiver of horse-flesh between my knees! To hear the turmoil of battle! To strike

again in vengeance! Ah, yes, that was it! The *Eagle* and her bloody deck were before me!

How I longed for the brave blue and buff, for the jangle of my old sabre! Then would I have been a man again, not a weakened, purposeless dupe in the garb of a Tory fop. About New York I knew the British forces were massing; General Howe was approaching Sandy Hook when I rode away from the army, and it was well known among Washington's officers that Admiral Lord Howe was sailing from England with a fleet and a large land force, expecting to assist in the grand coup that was to capture Long Island, annihilate Washington's army, and end the war triumphantly for King George. There was but one path for me to tread; it led straight back to General Washington, and the easiest way for me to make my start was the best — the window. I was an object of suspicion in the household, and should I go down the stairs unpleasant scenes would result, with, perhaps, more scorn from Gayle Langford, for now that she was rested and clothed once more I doubted not that she would forget all but the fact that I was a rebel. I threw one leg over the window-sill and was calculating on the strength of the vines to which I must trust myself in my descent, when an exclamation

behind me caused me to turn. I had tarried too long, for in the doorway stood an old lady with hair like snow, and at her side was Gayle Langford.

For one brief instant did I hesitate in choosing whether to clutch the vines and make away or to remain. I chose the latter, and, scrambling to my feet, made my best bow.

"Truly honored am I by this call," I said, stiffly.

"Which seems to have been made at the last tick of opportunity if we were to see you."

Mrs. Wilmoth stepped into the room and pointed to the window as she spoke. The girl said nothing, nor could I read her eyes, for she stood much in the shadow.

"Yes," I replied, "I was leaving."

"Like a gentleman?"

The contempt of her tone stung me.

"I heard the call of duty," I said.

"Indeed! And its message?"

"Its message was a rebuke that I should longer linger here while off yonder" (my arm waved toward the coast) "my comrades are on the eve of the death-grapple. My place now is at the side of General Washington."

I saw her eyes soften as I spoke, and at the name of Washington she clapped her hands.

"But why the window?" she asked.

"Because I was foolish, Madam," I said. "Physically suffering, I also was much disturbed in mind by the suspicions directed against me and — and —"

"Mistress Langford?"

With a quiet smile she completed the sentence for me.

"Then you know —"

"The whole story, Captain Lester."

Gayle Langford had stepped forward into the candle-light and spoken.

"I have acknowledged my falsehood, told on an impulse as — a — a — protection, and we are now known as we are — you, a reb —" (the blood flamed in her cheeks) "a Continental soldier, and I a Loyalist to King George."

"It is this we have come to tell you, Captain. My son is a major in your army. You are wounded and weak. You can best serve your country by recovering your strength and not by driving yourself to the grave by exhaustion. We will leave you now and you had best return to bed. Good night."

With a graceful curtsy she turned towards the door; as I bowed to her I caught the gaze of Gayle Langford, and long after I had again crept

between the sheets I tossed about uneasily, vainly trying to assure myself as to what I had read in her eyes. Was it pity? Was it more than pity? Was it — ? But my exhausted system clamored for rest and I fell into a heavy slumber.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A MAID AND A SONG

**T**HE lazy flapping of a blind against the casing of the window seemed beating a tattoo on my brain, and I opened my eyes to find, much to my astonishment, that the sun was high in the sky. From the yard below there came a peculiar whirring and the sound of a girl's voice singing in a subdued tone a ballad popular with the Continental army:

“My lover is a soldier lad,  
King George's crown he's scorning.  
He rides and fights with Washington  
In Liberty's bright morning.”

“Putnam!”

The song had ended and the singer had voiced the call that caused my sleepy eyes to open wider, for, in truth, was the name one to thrill a Patriot soldier.

"Putnam! Putnam, I say!"

Vexation crept into the tone and the voice was raised.

"Yassum."

It was the voice of a darky boy, and as I raised on my elbow and peeped slyly out the window I saw the lazy little rascal yawning and stretching himself under a tree, though the girl was not in view.

"You lump of laziness, have you been asleep so early in the day?"

"No'm! No'm!" He was now on his feet, but stood scratching his woolly head, dully. "I done sot down hyar jes' er minute ter think erbout — erbout —"

"Never mind! If you don't stay awake, some of these Tories will catch you sure."

"Yassum, I'se gwine ter stay awake, Miss Mary. I shorely is."

He hurried around the corner of the house to where the girl was, and I clambered out of bed, and though my head throbbed somewhat, I was happy to note that my strength was considerable. I had just slipped into my clothes when there came a rap on my door.

"Well!" I responded.

"Marse Captain, de Missus she say is you awake yet?"

I laughed as I recognized Putnam's voice.

"I'm not sure, Putnam. Come in and see."

The door was opened and a negro boy of about twelve years stood before me. He was as black as the heart of midnight, but his eyes were bright and his broad mouth seemed constantly on the verge of a wide grin. He was bareheaded and barefooted, and in his hands he carried a pitcher of water.

"De Missus say she sen' up your breakfas' if you all is awake."

"Give me the water, Putnam, and go tell your mistress that I'll be down in a moment. Understand?"

"Yassir."

He handed me the pitcher and then turned and scampered down the stairway. The cool water was a delight; I removed the bandage from my head and splashed in the bowl like a schoolboy, and then I found myself standing before the mirror and pluming myself with all of the care of a London dandy. True, the cut of my clothes bespoke the Tory, but little I heeded that. In truth, I confess I was pleased at their gorgeousness, for with my coat on, the bandage



absent from my head, and my face freshened by the long sleep, I fancied Mary Wilmoth would find me a very different looking personage from the weary, suffering, fainting wretch who had staggered half-clothed into her presence twenty-four hours before, though my face yet lacked the flush of health. Going to the window I peeped cautiously out, but no one was in sight. The whirring continued, but no song arose. I turned to the door and passed out into the hallway to the stairs. I soon found that my legs were yet trembly and unsteady, but I descended the stairs with a tolerably firm tread, and as I reached the hallway below Mrs. Wilmoth stepped out from the parlor and extended her hand in greeting.

"We are much pleased that you are able to be out of your bed, Captain," she said.

"Dear Madam, my tongue is halting twixt a self-berating of my indolence that kept me so late abed, and thanks for your graciousness in permitting me such indulgence."

She smiled.

"It is in such indomitable wills that the hope of liberty lies."

And then I blushed like a schoolboy at her praise, and she led the way into the parlor, where Gayle Langford stood as though awaiting me.

She was dressed in a very plain gown, borrowed from Mary Wilmoth, but the sombre garb of a nun could not diminish the imperious dignity that distinguished her and made glorious a beauty that in a careful analysis showed defects.

"Your bright eyes are answers to the hope I was about to express that your sleep had been refreshing," I said, bowing to her.

"And your pretty speech is proof that pain and fatigue have not clogged your tongue," she replied with a pretty curtsy, whereat we all three laughed and fell to an exchange of commonplaces which was only interrupted by Mrs. Wilmoth urging me to step into the dining-room for my breakfast.

In truth, I ought not to say she urged me, for my appetite was clamoring for a cup of the coffee whose fragrance had found its way to my nostrils. And as I sat at table Gayle Langford told me of her determination to return to Philadelphia, making the start the next morning. 'Twas such news as I might have expected, but I confess that I did not. The events of the last thirty-six hours seemed to have been weeks in transpiring; during those hours of danger, of distress and exposure, we had been so much in each other's company, aye, so much to each other, that in an unconscious

way I had come to regard myself as her guardian, her protector, and in the beauty of this mid-summer morning, with the majesty and peace of Valley Forge about us, I had forgotten for the moment that she was the proudest Loyalist maid in all the Colonies, the daughter of Peter Langford, whose hatred of the rebels to his King was such that he died when liberty's message had sounded, and that I was in her eyes a traitor, a man whose sword was drawn in opposition to that which she held most dear. But when the first shock of a surprise I should not have felt had passed I remembered it all and gulped a cup of Mrs. Wilmoth's steaming coffee in an effort to compose myself, for I had found our brief companionship most pleasant, fraught with hardships and vexations though it had been.

In her return to Philadelphia I foresaw the dividing of our pathways, with slight chance that they would ever merge again. The guide-post pointed her to wealth, ease, the splendor of fashion's world; destiny beckoned me with bloody finger to the horror of battle-fields, the dreariness of lonely bivouacs — perhaps the unknown grave of a soldier. How human impulses shift and change, like the sands on the beach! Last night I was for clambering out of a window

and putting forth to escape her, and now, like a dolt, I sat scalding my throat because she had said she was preparing to leave me.

"Why to-morrow? Are you not welcome here?" I asked, at length.

She raised her eyes to mine and the tears were on the lashes as she asked:

"Can you have forgotten the trust Erasmus guards — and my mother?"

"No, — your duty is there," I said slowly.  
"Who accompanies you?"

"Putnam is to drive — we take the Wilmoth chaise."

I set my cup down and looked hard at her.

"You will journey with no escort save that negro boy, along —"

"I am sure there will be no danger."

"Along roads infested with highwaymen?"

"I have neither gold nor jewels to tempt them," she replied smiling.

"But — but these devils prize — beauty — equally with jewels."

A wave of red crept slowly up from her throat, and I turned my eyes away to relieve her embarrassment.

"Nevertheless, Captain, I must take the risk. We go to-morrow."

I glanced again at her, and saw the old flash in her eyes. What a soldier she would have been had she been a man! But I had decided a point.

"Then if there is a horse about this place I ride with you."

I would have sworn that sudden catch of her breath was for pleasure, but when she spoke it was to voice a remonstrance.

"No, no, it must not be."

"Will my company be so distasteful, then?"

'Twas impertinence, I know, but for some reason I was nettled at her manner of speech, and my nasty temper bested me.

"I have not detected myself considering that question," she replied, haughtily.

My word for it, 'twas a waspish sting her words gave me, and for a moment I was of a mind to wash my hands of the whole mess and let her fare as fate should will, but after I had taken another swallow of coffee and the sting had eased a bit I saw my error.

"Your pardon, Mistress Langford. Your lash is just, and —"

"Oh, but it was petulant of me," she said, warming suddenly. "You have done so much for me, Captain, and my wicked tongue has ill repaid you."

"Nay! Nay! 'Twas right well deserved, say I. But to your journey; I shall ride by your side." And e'en as I spoke I was swearing to myself that such another capricious maid did not live in all the Colonies.

"But your head is —"

"Of scant use for brains, but amply able to stop stools."

"Ah!" She was leaning across the table towards me. "A stool? You forget you have not told me the story of your bandage. Not a tavern brawl?"

Here was a pretty situation. I had no mind to tell the girl that I was fighting in a public tavern because her name had been mentioned in a way not to my liking, and I was not inclined to lie to her about it.

"Mistress Langford, I assure you my hurt was received in an affair in no wise discreditable to myself, but for reasons of my own I ask to be excused from relating the incident."

"Oh, certainly." Her tone was indifferent.

I tried to think of something that would ease the conversation into channels less thickly strewn with rocks, but nothing came to my tongue, and we both sat there stiffly silent until I had finished

eating. Mrs. Wilmoth had excused herself when I first sat down to breakfast.

"Shall we walk out into the yard?" I asked, at last. "I think I heard Mistress Mary out there, and I have not yet paid my respects to her."

"I think I prefer the cool of the parlor."

In the hallway she left me, and a moment later I heard her voice in the parlor raised in careless lilts of song. I confess I was vexed that she had so coolly declined to accompany me, but I marched down the hallway and out into the yard in my most careless manner, and with never a glance to the rear. The morning was well advanced, and already the rays of heat could be seen dancing between the house and the woodlands beyond the meadow, but for the first time I got a good view of Valley Forge, and paused a moment in the doorway to enjoy the scene. Months later, when I viewed those rugged hills and tortuous gorges under vastly different conditions, the memory of that blazing July morning oft came to mock me in the bitterest winter the valley ever knew.

I strolled around the house to where I heard again the peculiar whirr and the low-sung words of a song.

“ Maids’ hearts must break for Freedom’s sake,  
Of this I give you warning,  
But the brave and true have work to do  
In Liberty’s bright morning.”

: Mary Wilmoth was so busy at her spinning-wheel that I was close beside her before she looked up with a start.

“ La, how you startled me, Mister — *Captain Lester*. ”

The words were accompanied by a winsome smile that showed me two rows of snow-white teeth and a most fetching dimple. Her head was bare and the winds had tossed and rumbled her raven hair recklessly. I looked into the sparkling eyes and felt my pulse bound. Aye, there was beauty without flaw.

“ I am pleased to see you able to be about this morning, ” she said, and extended her hand in greeting.

“ When the lark trilled I deafened my ears with slumber, but when Juno sang I spurned Morpheus, ” I said, and lifted her fingers to my lips.

Heigho! ’Twas wondrous bold, the speech and the salute together, but I had not been of warm flesh and red blood could I have resisted. And while I was noting the glow in her cheeks deepen I heard a voice behind me.



"Oh, — Captain Lester, I brought you a hat."

I turned and beheld Gayle Langford, who stood at the corner of the house holding a hat towards me, a smile on her lips. I did not realize that I was still clinging to Mary Wilmoth's hand until that young lady jerked it from my grasp, and as she did so I saw a mocking light dancing in Gayle's eyes, the playground for her emotions.

"It belongs to Mrs. Wilmoth's son, but she kindly suggested that I bring it to you lest the hot sun cause your injured head trouble."

"I had forgotten that I was bareheaded," I answered, taking the hat, and then my face must have dyed red, for at the unfortunate speech the girl gave vent to a peal of laughter. I jammed the hat on my head savagely. "I mean — that — I mean the shade here —"

"And the breeze from the spinning-wheel was so refreshing," she interrupted, and the mockery still danced in her eyes.

"At least the song was," I said, stiffly. "A Continental who felt the throb of an aching head while Patriot lips were singing 'Liberty's Morning' would of a certainty be a weakling."

I saw the mockery die out of her eyes, and her chin rose just a trifle as she replied:

"Happy Continentals! The blaze of the sun is tempered by traitorous songs, and —"

"No, not that!" cried Mary Wilmoth. "I like not the word 'traitor,' Mistress Langford. 'Tis harsh!"

She had turned to her spinning and was softly pedalling the wheel until the other's words had brought her to her feet. Like a flash Gayle Langford's hands were outstretched towards the Patriot maid, and I saw the ice in her eyes melting.

"Forgive me, I beg," she said. "'Twas unkind of me — and I your debtor for so much. Captain Lester lashed my prejudices, and they cried out."

"A truce twixt King George and the Colonists!" cried Mary, clasping Gayle's hands. Then, as is ever the way with women, their lips met. The little Tory laughed gaily, and then turned and ran back to the house, leaving me standing there staring after her until the whirr of the spinning-wheel sounded, and I turned to see Mary Wilmoth with her foot on the pedal, busy at work in silence.

"'Twas the fault of my unruly tongue," I said, stepping to her side. "May I not be forgiven?" I swept my hat from my head as I spoke.

"You must keep your hat on, for you were not to blame, Captain. She was laughing because—" She paused, and her cheeks burned a deeper red. "Not all of King George's Loyalists are in the field," she added, hastily.

I understood her confusion perfectly. It was as clear to her as to me that had I not been kissing her fingers so enthusiastically just as Gayle Langford appeared the tiff would not have occurred.

"Nor is all of the Continental soldiers' inspiration in the flag we carry!"

As I spoke she bent lower over the wheel, but my bold eyes noted the red still dyeing her cheeks. Her deft hands faltered an instant, and then there was a snarl of flax that stopped the wheel.

"Let me help you."

Unheeding her half-hearted protests, I began clawing at the tangle, and as I now recall the incident I must have made a bad snarl hopeless, for, as I worked, the glowing cheek of the girl came close to me, and, though I nervously pulled and hauled at the flax, my eyes were on the tempting beauty before me. Then our hands met between the spokes of the wheel and I felt my pulse suddenly begin pounding furiously. The contact was for only an instant, but it was sufficient to send the blood rushing to my head,

with the result that a network of pains raced from temple to temple and the trees began to dance. I took a step, but the ground was rising, and I would have gone down ingloriously had not Mary Wilmoth glanced about and noted my tottering step. With a cry she clutched me by the arm. Her grasp steadied me and I stood erect.

"Let me lie under the tree a moment and it will pass," I said, and staggered to the tree, and her arms supported me as I sank down at full length in its shade.

"You must have a cold application," she said, and I saw her running towards the well. Down came the sweep, and in a moment she came flying back with a gourd of cool water.

I lay very quiet while she made a bandage of my kerchief and cooled it until it eased the throbbing agony. Once I opened my eyes, but closed them instanter, for I had looked full into her face and had drunk in her faultless beauty.

"Putnam! Putnam!"

I looked around and saw the little negro standing close to the well, looking at us and yawning.

"Yassum, I'm comin'," he responded, and came lazily forward.

"Do you know where mother and — the other lady are?"

The darky scratched his head. "Miss Mary," he said, with great deliberation, "I'se mos' suah I done see 'em in de ga'den jus' now. Dey was two ladies dar, an' I reckon as how dey was dem, Miss Mary. I go right dis minit an' see fo' suhten, an' den I hurry back an' —"

"Never mind. Captain Lester is ill and you must help me get him to his room."

Supported by the two I was led tottering into the house and up to my room, where I sprawled on the bed and mentally cursed the fate that made me a prey to such a weakness.

"Thank you," I said, as the girl wet the bandage again. "A rest will set me right."

I kept my eyes closed, but I heard Putnam yawning, and with my promise to call her should I want anything, the girl withdrew. In truth, I was most heartily ashamed of myself. A velvety cheek, a liquid eye, a warm hand, and I had gone all a-quiver like a schoolboy! What a queer thing was love — and what a devilish thing, if my splitting head counted for aught. True, my months of war had not made of me a connoisseur of women, but, by the sword of Washington, if ever maid was lovable, Mary Wilmoth was!

And then, vain prig, I pictured myself as I should stand before her — some uncertain day — in the brave buff and blue of the Continentals, and have her kiss my sword and send me a-riding with Washington with her dainty kerchief fluttering encouragement as I flashed my sabre in salute. I had fought passing well before, but now! Ah, now!

I was aroused from my thoughts by voices in the yard below, and then came the unmistakable clank of sabres, the stamping and whinnying of horses, and I slipped from the bed and knelt at the window, my training having made me most cautious. What I saw almost wrung a cry of delight from my lips. Below me was a squad of Continental soldiers, four of them, standing at their horses' heads, and the leader, wearing the uniform of a major, was clasping Mrs. Wilmoth in his arms, while she cried with delight and patted his shoulder lovingly. It was all as clear as sunlight that Major Wilmoth had ridden out from Philadelphia to visit his home.

I lay back on the bed and listened to the excited hum below stairs, and envied the lucky soldier who had a home and mother to visit. But it's a dark road a man's thoughts travel when he starts at this point, and I was only aroused from

my communings by a heavy tread on the stairs and the gentle voice of a woman, occasionally interrupted by the heavier tones of a man, and then Mrs. Wilmoth stepped into the room, followed closely by a man I knew to be her son before she said:

“My son, Major Wilmoth, Captain Lester.”

I was struggling to my feet, when his kindly voice stopped me.

“Tut! Tut! Captain, lie still. A feather bed is a luxury no soldier can afford to rise from until necessity calls.”

He laughed as he spoke, and as I swept him with a glance I knew I should like Major Wilmoth. He was a handsome fellow, thirty-two, tall, spare, and straight, with a pair of eyes that were keen and kindly.

“’Tis delicious, sir,” I replied, “but I fear I will be spoiled for a pillow of boots and a bed of grass.”

“But this head of yours, tell me of it. I have some skill in doctoring.”

He came to me and took my wrist in his hand, but as he counted the beats I saw his eyes slowly travelling over my attire, and a frown wrinkled his brow.

“I am not in satins and laces from choice,

Major, as I can explain. As for my head, it is the worse for having stopped a stool flung by a sturdy arm."

"A brawl, Captain?"

His voice was low and even, and I felt his eyes searching me.

"I pledge you it was naught for which I need feel shame. But had it not been for a squad of your men, sir, it would have cost my life."

He looked at me a moment without speaking. Then a light seemed to be dawning in his mind.

"Was it at the Golden Lion?" he asked.

I nodded, and he suddenly seized my hand in both of his.

"Egad, Captain, I know the story now. It was because of a girl, and unarmed you tried to clean out a room full."

I began signalling him desperately, for Gayle Langford had ascended the stairs unnoticed and now stood in the doorway at his back. But he misconstrued my efforts.

"Tut! Tut! I know the whole brave story. My sergeant told me how you faced the cutthroats until the stool put you down. 'Twas a brave deed, and all for a bright eye and pretty face, eh, Captain?"



"Oh, you do not understand at all!" I fairly groaned, my eyes on Gayle Langford.

Wilmoth laughed in his cheery way. "Don't understand? Fie! Think you I have no weakness for the wenches? But I came to doctor Cæsar, not to praise him. That broken head must torture you."

He had caught my half-suppressed groan, born of an agony of spirit rather than of body, and promptly interpreted it wrongly.

"I think he needs a physician's attentions," spoke up Gayle Langford, coming forward.

I tried to catch her eye to read there what interpretation she had put on Wilmoth's words.

"Well, I doctored before I soldiered, so I may be able to help him." He was fingering about my skull with a touch so deft that it satisfied me that he knew his profession.

"I feared a skull fracture, but happily it proves not so," he said at length. "Your injuries are no worse than bruises, and a day or two of quiet in bed with some treatment will put you on your feet again, as good a target as ever a redcoat shot at."

I glanced at the girl, but in her eyes I read nothing but hauteur and indifference. I turned to Wilmoth.

"I ride to-morrow morning, Major."

He stared at me. "Ride — where? Why?"

I sought the Tory maid's eyes again, but she had crossed to the window. However, I would have sworn I saw a faint tinge of color creeping up into her cheeks.

"To Philadelphia as escort for Mistress Langford," I responded. "She goes in the morning with none but Putnam."

"Such a sacrifice is quite unnecessary, Captain. Putnam and I shall not be molested."

The girl had turned towards me and she spoke carelessly.

"No, you will stay on the feathers," replied Wilmoth. "I return to Philadelphia to-morrow, and will gladly escort Mistress Langford."

For an instant I was on the point of rebellion, but the smile the girl gave him and the memory of a Patriot maid with the glow of wine in her cheeks checked my speech. It would be very pleasant to play invalid at Valley Forge a few days; of that I was certain.

"I suppose you are right," I said at last.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

**M**AJOR WILMOTH proved an able man in the concoction of liniments and applications from the herbs of the farm, and before night had fallen I felt my head to be clearer than it had been since it stopped the stool, but it was Mary Wilmoth who bandaged my head and kept the cloths wet with the soothing liniment. In truth, I may as well confess, too, that I required a prodigious lot of attention, for the bandage just would not remain in place — or is it better I should admit I pulled the rags awry purposely? Mayhap 'twas a bit of fever in my blood that caused me to do this, but this I know, 'twas most delicious to have Mary Wilmoth's soft fingers arranging the bandage, and to hear her gentle voice expressing sympathy when I moaned. Ah, me! As I look back at it now through the smoke of my pipe I cannot find it in

my heart to chide myself for affecting a suffering I did not feel. Her touch, her voice — but you cannot feel and hear as I did then.

“How long since you saw your brother last?” I asked her.

“Six months,” she replied. “He has been in Virginia until recently, when he was detailed for duty in the capital, and to-morrow he leaves us again.” There was a catch in her voice.

“Yes, the lot of a soldier.”

“Yes, yes, duty! Always it is duty! There is no time for aught else!”

“Nay, not even for — for love. It must flash into the soldier’s life like a meteor and catch step with his heart-throbs, else Love falls by the way and he marches alone with Duty.”

She was deftly arranging the bandages, and as I spoke I looked full into her eyes, and then my hand suddenly clasped hers. “Alone with Duty,” I repeated tremulously.

“Captain — you — oh, the awfulness of war!” She turned her face towards the window, but her hand rested in mine. “Duty — always duty!” she exclaimed, as though repeating to herself.

There was a heavy step on the stairs, and she snatched her hand away just as her brother’s head appeared above the landing.

"How fares our patient, sister?" he called.

"Much better, I am sure," I answered for her, while the girl fumbled with the bandages.

"Good! Let's try that pulse. Um-m-m!" He glanced sharply at me as he counted the beats. "Pulse entirely too rapid. Strange. Probably weakness and disquietude. Saturate that bandage well this time, Mary, and we'll try letting him rest and sleep."

I tried to protest, but he silenced me by assuring me that head injuries required perfect quiet and rest, though the patient was always clamorous for company and excitement.

"You'll get all you want of both before King George squeals. Better lie still and rest while you can. Dream of Washington if you wish to — for oft you will ride with him and dream of this peace and rest."

Then they left me, Wilmoth's arm about his sister, but at the head of the stairs she turned, and the glance she gave me, brief though it was, gave me pleasant thoughts for company, and soon I fell asleep. But they were not pleasant dreams that came to my pillow. I was riding into battle, when my horse was shot from under me and I found myself prostrate with a multitude of red-coats confronting me, each with levelled musket.

I closed my eyes and awaited the shock of bullets, but they came not, and I opened my eyes. Between the British and me stood a woman, her arms outstretched. (Such is the power of dreams.) Filled with wonder I sprang to my feet, and as the British wheeled and marched away the woman turned her face towards me. It was Gayle Langford.

I gasped and awakened to find the sun fast setting, but its last rays falling full on my face. I was wet with perspiration, and small wonder was it my dreams had been distorted.

'Twas surprising the improvement I noted in my condition when I went down-stairs the next morning. The dizziness had gone and my keen appetite was evidence that my old strength would soon return. A blithe enough morn it was, but there was little of song and cheer in the Wilmoth home, for scarcely had the breakfast-table been cleared than Wilmoth's men appeared with the horses in the road before the house. I stood on the little veranda while the aged mother and the sister clung to son and brother, weeping, for now that the Declaration of Independence had been signed it meant renewed vigor in the war, and the soldier they were bidding adieu was apt to see stern hours ere he came riding home

again; indeed, if he ever came. But, God's mercy! Little we dreamed how soon he would be in that house once more, nor that his home-coming would be more grief-laden than this departure.

Putnam drove out of the lane with the chaise and awaited Gayle Langford. Her farewells to mother and daughter were scarcely heard by them, but when she turned to me a sudden realization shot to my brain that she was about to pass out of my life, and it brought a curious saddening pang.

"Captain Lester, 'tis the parting of our ways, I presume," she said, slowly.

"It seems so," I replied. "May your future be less stormy than that fragment of your life into which I have entered."

"But at my home — if I have a home left me — you will ever be welcome, Captain. May I not hope to see you there some day?"

"I would be most happy, Mistress Langford, to entertain such a hope, but war is a hard master. Your way leads to Philadelphia and home, while I go to join Washington and offer my life in battling against that you hold dear. Most likely 'tis our farewell."

She dropped her head as I spoke, and was silent

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a moment. I, too, found my tongue suddenly tied, and so we stood without speaking. I looked down the road, hot and dusty in the July sunshine, winding down through a rocky defile and then up and over a rugged hill. When she should pass over that hill 'twould be the ending of it all. And how little was that all!

"Time we were off!" called Major Wilmoth, and the girl's head raised as she extended her hand.

"But through it all, please believe me most grateful!" she exclaimed.

I clasped the soft hand and looked into her eyes.

"And I am grateful, also — grateful to the fate that privileged me to serve you." My lips touched her finger tips, and then she turned away.

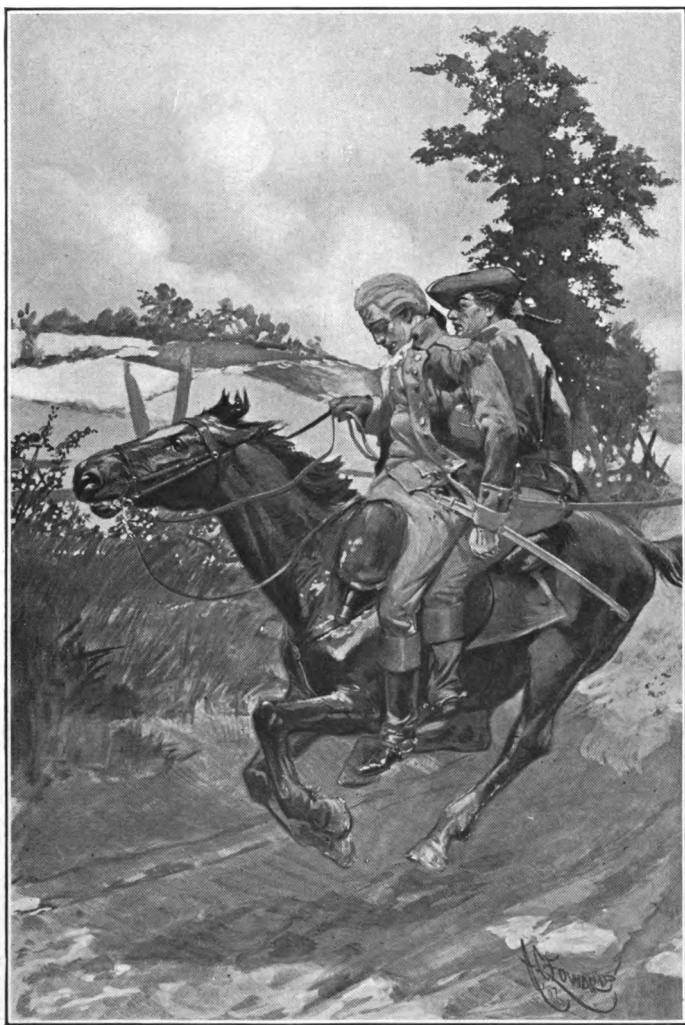
We three who were left behind watched the cavalcade as it passed down the road at a brisk trot, two soldiers riding in advance of the chaise and two in the rear, while Major Wilmoth rode beside the conveyance. As they passed over the brow of the hill we saw the officer turn in his saddle and wave his hat in salute, and methought there was flutter of kerchief from the chaise. Then they dipped over the hill and were gone.



I sat on the veranda alone while mother and daughter went into the house and wept out their grief. I felt an impatience now for action, for here was I, a soldier, sitting indolently in a quiet nook of Valley Forge when there was work for every Patriot hand! But on the morrow Putnam would return, bringing with him my horse, and on the following day I would be off to report my miserable failure to the Chief, and to beg for a chance to retrieve my failure by desperate deeds. Little chance was there that Gayle Langford and I would ever meet again. Poor lass! I wondered what she would find where her home had once stood.

The spinning-wheel was still that day and no word of song came from Mary Wilmoth's lips. In truth, I saw her but little, and then the message of sorrow that was writ on her face told me that 'twas a day which should be hers alone. Dinner was but a solemn ceremony; the ladies scarcely touched food, and I ate but sparingly. Then during the dull, hot hours of the afternoon I fretted alone in the yard, pacing nervously under the trees and planning for the future, and always at the end of my beat I paused to stare down the hot, dusty road toward Philadelphia.

My thoughts wandered and lagged, for I had



I SAW THAT THE RIDER IN FRONT WAS SUPPORTED BY THE  
ARMS OF THE ONE BEHIND. — *Page 187.*



suddenly paused and was gazing at a blotch on the afternoon sky, certainly a horseman coming over the ridge from towards Philadelphia. Nearer came the horse, in a heavy, rolling lope and I stared curiously at its rider. Was he drunk? The distance was great, but I could see that he lurched unsteadily and, — ha! there were two riders. I could note this plainly now. Then I dashed toward the road, for I detected the buff and blue of a Continental uniform. On they came, and I shaded my eyes with my hand as I strained to conquer the distance with my vision. Closer, closer, and I saw that the rider in front was supported by the arms of the one behind. God's name! 'Twas an officer! Then I caught my breath and sprang over the fence, for the officer had straightened himself momentarily in the saddle and I recognized the features of Wilmoth. And surely that red stain was blood! Aye, now the crimson of it was to be seen on his face and on the arms of the soldier who supported him in the saddle.

"Heaven's mercy! What ill has befallen you?" I cried as the horse pounded up to where I stood beneath a tree.

"A cutthroat attack, sir," replied the soldier, reining in his mount.

Wilmoth's chin was on his breast and his eyes were closed, his face ghastly, like ashes streaked with blood. I reached up and the soldier loosened his grasp on Wilmoth, who swayed in the saddle and then, with a feeble, instinctive clutch at the leather, slid over into my arms, unconscious.

"They jumped us in the cut beyond the Red Fox inn, sir, ten miles out from the city." The soldier swung himself from the saddle. "They volleyed —"

"The girl!" I cried. "What of her?"

He shook his head. "I don't know. The mercy o' God, but 'twas quick and hellish, sir. They fired and emptied three of our saddles and then closed with us. There was no time for powder-burning by us. 'Twas sabre and death. I and my mate were jogging in the rear when hell belched. He tumbled over when they fired, and then I saw 'em charging the chaise. I heard the girl scream and saw the Major standing in his stirrups with his sabre swinging; then I rode for him, hacking my way through the devil's imps."

I sprang to the horse and had one foot a-stirrup when I felt an iron grip on my arm, and, turning, I looked into the haggard face of the soldier.

"What would you do?" he asked.

"Save that girl from their bloody clutches," I said.

"Your pardon, sir, but that can wait now — he cannot." He pointed to the form on the sward beneath the tree.

"Yes — yes — bring some water in your hat from the spring yonder," and I turned to Wilmoth and began loosening his clothes.

We wet our kerchiefs and stanchd the flow of blood from a wound in the breast, and while I strove to revive Wilmoth, the trooper continued his story of the fight.

"I got to him and we fought our best, but the chaise pony lunged ahead and left us behind. You should have seen the Major fight then! 'Save the girl!' he shouts to me, and we tried to fight our way to her, but a murderous dog shoved a pistol into his face, and as I was not in position to strike, I spurred my horse and rode him down, but as he fell he fired. I saw Wilmoth clutch at his breast with both hands, and I caught him as he was falling. Then I swung over behind him and kept him in the saddle. I dropped my sabre in doing this, and without a weapon, with my mates all down, I could do nothing for the girl if she still lived. I clapped spur and made a

dash down the road. Luckily, they didn't follow, and — "

I heard not the finish, for in the cottage doorway I saw Mary Wilmoth standing, shading her eyes and looking at us. The next moment she came running out to the road, and instinctively I sprang in front of the prostrate form of her brother and motioned her back.

"Don't come here," I cried, but she heeded not.

Without pausing or speaking she came on until I ran to meet her and caught her by the shoulders.

"Let go! I know they have killed him! You shall not keep me away!"

With a quick wrench she tore herself from my grasp and in an instant had flung herself across the body of her brother, where she sobbed in an agony of grief, and though I tried in my awkward way to comfort her, it was idle speech until I exclaimed:

"We must get him to a bed. Mistress Mary, be your brother's sister!"

She sprang to her feet and dashed the tears away.

"'Tis well spoken, Captain. Do you carry him in — tenderly — and — I will prepare mother."

Without another word she sped towards the

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house, while the trooper and I followed, carrying the wounded officer as best we could.

Half an hour later we had him sufficiently revived to whisper to us directions which his own skill as a physician dictated.

"And you — Lester — how is — your — strength?" he queried brokenly, but with a gaze so steady that I knew its significance.

"Equal to my duty!" I cried, and he smiled.

No saddle-horse was there about the place, save the trooper's, and weary as it was the saddle was again strapped to its back. For weapon I had naught save a dress sword of Wilmoth's, a mere rapier, which the brave mother brought to me. There had been but few words, and now as I stood ready to go, there were but few. Wilmoth half-raised one hand, and, stepping forward, I took it in my own.

"I will do my best," I said, and turned towards the door.

A few hasty words of thanks and farewell to mother and daughter and I was in the saddle, but paused to lean down towards Mary Wilmoth.

"'Tis not farewell. I shall come again!" I murmured, and the color deepened in her cheeks.

That July day I spake with the tongue of a prophet.



## CHAPTER X

### AT THE RED FOX INN

**A**T the brow of the hill I turned in my saddle, but about the Wilmoth house there was no one visible, and with a queer feeling of being utterly alone, I pushed my jaded mount forward at as fast a pace as it could make.

The sun was already hanging on the bluffs in the west, and shadows were creeping down from the forests, but, fret and urge as I did, the horse beneath me could not be gotten out of a heavy, plodding walk. In the west the sky was in a dull glow, as though the sun had welded earth and heaven together; then the dusk deepened and the shrill cry of some wild bird came to me from the river somewhere off to my right, bringing to me a shuddering remembrance of the death of Wilson on that night scout. Ere the morrow dawned might I not be with him in his eternal

bivouac? The road turned sharply to the left along a rugged hillside, and as I jogged around the turn, I suddenly drew rein, for close beside the road, perched on a mammoth boulder, was a youth who made a strange, clicking sound on something he held in his hands.

"Hello!" I cried, taken by surprise.

The youth looked towards me, but even in the gloom I could see that there was neither surprise nor alarm on his face — naught but stolidness.

"Cricket loves a summer night —  
Hi-lo-diddle-de-dee —  
Sings its song without any light —  
Hi-lo — listen to me!"

The thing he held in his hands was clicked in a rude accompaniment to the doggerel chant, and though at first my hand had gone to my rapier hilt, I now released my grip.

"Who are you?" I challenged.

The clicking stopped an instant.

"Rhymer!" he answered, and the clicking was renewed.

I smiled. In spite of my desperate mission, in spite of my distress of mind, there was that about the figure on the boulder that gave me a touch of mirth.

"By the shade of Shakespeare, 'tis a proper enough name," I replied.

"Rhymer, Rhymer is my name.  
Never, no never, will I bring it shame.  
My cricket I love, and never do I sing  
Of Washington, nor of George, the King."

"Neither Patriot nor Loyalist, eh? What is that thing you have?"

The clicking ceased, and after scrutinizing me a moment, he held it out towards me, saying:

"Cricket."

'Twas a queer article I held in my hand, being nothing but a quarter of a large hickory-nut shell with a groove around it lengthwise and with a string stretched taut along this groove. A bit of wood was twisted into this string, and as the fingers thrummed one end of the wood, the tension of the string clicked the other end sharply against the dry shell. I handed it back to him.

"How far is it to the Red Fox inn?" I straightened in the saddle, ready to ride on.

"Red Fox lives beyond the wood;  
I'd hate to walk, but a big man could.  
There my cricket's song will bring no smile,  
For it cannot be heard a double half-mile."

"Double half-mile? Oh, a mile from here, beyond the wood."

The rhymer had left his perch on the rock and was now walking slowly in a circle around my horse and me, and through the dusk I could see that his eyes were noting every detail of animal and rider. His cricket was hushed and he spoke no word, but swept me from stirrup to head with that solemn, owlsh gaze. For a moment I humored him in silence, but as he slowly tramped around and around me I began to feel a creepy sensation as though a witch were casting a spell upon me.

"Have done with your staring, you imp of the shadows!" I exclaimed in vexation. "What do you here?"

Never a word came in reply, but he paused in his circling and stood looking at me unblinkingly. My curiosity set me to studying him, but all that my scrutiny told me was that before me stood a youth of very uncertain age, tall and gaunt, ill-dressed, and with a shock of straw-colored hair. "A half-wit," I told myself in conclusion.

"Out of my way, dunce!" I cried, "or I'll ride you down."

But never a muscle twitched, nor did his stare falter for the space of a breath.

"By the dagger of Brutus, you have bored a hole from my breastbone to my spinal cord with your stare! Tell me, what may it please you to decide?"

I spoke sharply, for anger was warming the blood of me. The cricket clicked and he droned in a low tone:

"Wild hawks know a game-cock from a hen —  
It's death to the cock to be trapped in a pen.  
A witch is a witch — rides a broomstick like a hag —  
Don't play macaroni on a soldier's nag."

The cricket hushed abruptly, and almost with the last word the strange being whirled and dashed into the timber on the hillside.

"Stop! Come back!" I shouted, but he gave me no heed.

The youth, be he fool or sage, had warned me! "Don't play macaroni on a soldier's nag." I glanced at my Tory finery, and, in truth, I was beruffled and frilled with lace and satins like a London dandy, even to the light rapier that hung at my side. And my horse? Simply a sturdy animal. But my eyes rested on my saddle. There was the telltale. No mincing macaroni ever chose such a saddle. It and the ponderous saddle-bags bespoke the trooper in every inch.

"Rhymer" had picked the flaws; would not others? "A witch is a witch, — rides a broomstick like a hag!" The shrewd imp was telling me to be consistent. Pah! I was not out to deceive, but to fight and rescue. Aye, to rescue a Tory who hated all I loved. I clucked to my horse and rode slowly forward. But, after all, how was it to be done? Gayle Langford was — where? Was I to go galloping up the road, crying out into the night a challenge to her assailants to come forth and do battle and then release her? Darkness was come and silence brooded over the earth, a fit time for deeds of stealth and cunning rather than of trumpet-blared recklessness.

The attack had taken place beyond the inn, and a duller brain than even mine could see that the plot of ambush was formed while Wilmoth's party rested at the tavern, and that when they had pressed on, the devils had begun their carnage. Had Gayle Langford survived? The answer was too plain. There was no doubt that no bullet had reached her — unfortunately. They had seen her at the inn and death was not her sentence. I found myself clutching at my rapier, and my heels scourging the horse's flanks until it was plunging forward once more in a gallop. The evening air was cooling to my brow, and after

a time I grew calmer. Down the road a light was shining through the darkness, probably the beacon of the Red Fox inn, and I drew rein and cudgelled my brains for a plan.

“ Wild hawks know a game-cock from a hen —  
It's death to the cock to be trapped in a pen.”

The Red Fox, undoubtedly, was the hotbed of crime, the headquarters of assassins, and the dunce on the hillside had warned me with his rhymes against being trapped in the pen; he had told me they would know “ a game-cock from a hen ” — a soldier from a fop. The Red Fox was close at hand; whatever my plan, I must choose it quickly. And I did. Slipping from my saddle, I led the horse back a little way into the wood and tied him to a tree, after which I returned to the road, deliberately sprawled myself at full length in the dust, and, setting my teeth, picked up a hand full of gravel and scraped my face with it that the blood-streaks would show. Then I trudged forward to where the great lantern hung in front of the inn.

Zounds! The memory of that night is heavy upon me now, and I fancy I can see again the faint flash of the heat lightning as it glimmered along the horizon in the east. The slight breeze

had fallen away until it was now a dead calm, with the stars peeping here and there from amidst broken masses of clouds, and over all a silence that seemed oppressive, until I drew close to the inn, a great, rambling structure of two stories, and then the quiet of the night was broken by a man's voice raised in a drinking song.

I fain would have paused beneath the beacon to take note of my appearance, but this was not to be, for, as I approached, a wizened little old man came to the open door and leaned carelessly against the casing, the while smoking a long-stemmed pipe. He was looking up at the sky for the moment, but as I advanced, limping, his eyes suddenly rested on me; and with an exclamation he stepped a pace backward, and, pipe in hand, stood looking at me irresolutely. At his exclamation the song hushed, and three or four other forms were framed in the doorway with its background of candle-light.

I limped boldly forward and crossed the threshold to confront an evil-looking set with the word "cutthroat" plainly stamped on their visages.

"Give me a seat and do your gaping afterwards," I said, pausing a moment, and assuming a surly tone.



As I spoke I ran my eyes over their faces, challenging their stares, and giving look for look. A short apron was about the waist of the wizened one, the badge of the host, and I scowled at him as he hesitated.

"D'ye hear, clown? A stool for a gentleman!"

The blood of a long line of innkeepers was too strong in his veins to resist the commanding tone, and his hands crossed themselves behind his back as he ducked his head in an obeisance.

"Yes, sir, most certainly, a stool ; sit here, sir, and may its comfort please you."

He placed a stool at a table for me and put his arm back of me for support as I sat down gingerly, straightened out my right leg, and pursed my lips as though in pain.

"A flagon of wine, landlord, and don't be as slow as you were with the stool."

"Your temper's brittle to-night," remarked one of the men, grinning, as the innkeeper danced away to fill my order.

I glowered at the speaker, and 'tis not flattery to myself that I say that my look feazed him, for the grin left his face and he stepped back a pace. Then I appeared to melt, and let my gaze wander carelessly.

"Mayhap it's none of your porridge, my buck, but I guess you're right, though it's devilish good reason I have for crabbedness." I glanced down at myself and began brushing my clothes.

"What's happened?"

"Horse threw me into the dust. Ugh! My throat's lined with it! Ho, landlord! Bring cups for my friends here. They shall help me moisten my temper."

The invitation to drink was as magic, and they crowded about me with rude banter concerning my mishap.

"Where'd it happen?" asked one, a murderous-looking lout who had not warmed at my invitation as the others had.

"Down below here—in a cut." I waved my hand towards Philadelphia, and while pretending to smooth my clothes I caught the glance that flashed from one to another, and which told me as though 'twere writ that these were they who had ambushed Wilmoth's party.

"Where's the horse?"

"Well-nigh to Philadelphia by this time, I expect. At least, he was going back in that direction as though all of the horse-devils were

after him the last I saw of him. Confound the brute, I suppose he saw something that caused him to whirl and bolt. I know I saw something—stars — when he threw me.”

The innkeeper brought the wine, and right merrily did they drink at my expense, and chaff at my plight seemed royal entertainment to them. I called again and again for more wine, and though I was precious careful to stint my own cup and to make bumpers of theirs, I gradually assumed an air of intoxication until, sprawling myself with a table as a rest for my elbows, I roared out bits of song and swore that should I ever meet up with that horse it should have an extra bait of corn for throwing me into the company of such good fellows. Since my meeting with Rhymer, I realized that craftiness and not bold effrontery must rescue Gayle Langford, for that she was a prisoner somewhere about the inn I felt certain. As to how I was to be of service to her God wot, not I.

“ And where might you be travelling, friend? ” queried one knave, his arm about my shoulder.

“ To the worms, ” I replied, blinking at him solemnly.

“ To the worms? ” he echoed, while the others stared.

"Of a truth, yes. And with me go ye all, for they hold frolic for us in the graves, whither we are journeying."

"Ugh! 'Tis a devilish dismal humor you have."

A shudder seemed to run through the crowd, and I saw an ashy pallor showing in more than one cheek, while the half-drained cups went shakingly to lips and the wine was gulped.

"Dismal? Breath o' me, man, 'tis not so! Are we not a merry party here? And what care we what feasts this sweet flesh of ours shall furnish after we lay it aside? 'Tis a long journey—or, mayhap, a short one, in these troublous times. A hot bullet, or perhaps a cold blade that warms itself in our vitals, —'tis soon ended—aye, even though it be the hangman's noose that interrupts our drop, squeezes our gullet, and cracks our neck!"

I had straightened up and delivered the grisly speech with all the dramatics I could command, dropping my voice towards the close until the words came in a hoarse whisper. I ran my eyes slowly over the group as I paused, and saw horror there. Faces that had shown pallor before were ghastly now, and more than one hand stole to throat and clutched at it as though the man were choking.

"Damn your croakings— who are you?" demanded one, fiercely, the gray still showing in his cheeks.

"An atom doomed to be blown here and there by the storm we call life."

"And where did you blow from last?"

"From Philadelphia."

"What brought you riding down into this community?"

I glanced carelessly around at the group, and everywhere I met black looks, but 'twas in keeping with my plan, for I had decided that they would suspect my real purpose less if I appeared careless of their good regard than if I sought their friendship. And if it came to a fight—

"Mayhap for my health," I replied, shrugging my shoulders. "It has grown wondrous sultry in the city since the Independence bell rang."

A puzzled look passed over their faces.

"Look here, you ain't alone in that idea. But you'd better speak plainer. Maybe we'd better understand each other for certain."

"Ho, landlord, more wine!" I called, wishing to gain a moment, for I was not prepared to speak plainly.

As the innkeeper hurried away to fill the order, there was a sudden clicking just outside the

front door, and the next instant Rhymer stood in the doorway, thrumming his cricket and executing a foolish sort of dance by hopping up and down on one foot and tapping the heel and toe of the other shoe on the floor.

“ Wild hawk prowls by day and by night —  
Game-cock is wise if he takes to flight.  
‘ Game-cock is mine,’ says the wild hawk brag,  
‘ For I’ve got my eye on the broomstick of a hag.’ ”

The dance of the dunce was not stayed by the crazy chant that was given in rhythm to the clicking of the cricket, and not once did he glance towards me, but it shot to my brain that he was intending his words for me. There was a sudden hush when the fellow first entered and began his jigging, then the innkeeper came forward.

“ Don’t mind him, gentlemen,” he said, “ it’s only Rhymer.”

“ And who is Rhymer? ” growled one.

The landlord flung out his arms and spread his palms.

“ Lor’, no one knows much about him except that he’s touched here ” (tapping his head), “ and works around at the farms. Sometimes he wanders away and is gone for days, but when he comes back he can’t tell where he has been, but

he says he has been with the squirrels and the birds. He's a good worker in the daytime, but at night he likes to wander around with his cricket, making up foolish rhymes."

I edged around to a position directly in front of the strange creature and looked him full in the face with a question plainly showing in my eyes, but though the fellow took no more notice of me than if I had been a stool, he stepped a bit closer and his voice was lower and hinted at a pleading tone as he chanted more doggerel:

"There was a game-cock that had no sense ;  
It crowed at night on an old rail fence ;  
But a bad man came slipping down the road —  
That was the very last time that game-cock crowed."

There was no doubt left in my mind. He was warning me. I was the game-cock that crowed at night — and, outside, danger was closing about me. Instinctively my hand crept to my rapier and loosened the blade in its scabbard and — yes, by the sword of Washington, a glimmer of satisfaction, of approval, or some kindred emotion, flashed across Rhymer's face as I did so. 'Twas always my weakness to hold in dread that which was unseen much more than that I could see, and so as the dunce began another

measureless dance to the clickety-click-click, clickety-click-click, of the cricket, I found myself edging towards the door with the intention of choosing my own battle-ground if fight I must.

The half-drunken varlets were vastly amused with the caperings of Rhymer, and I was near to succeeding when there were a few hasty steps heard without, and as I sprang for the door I was confronted by a man of my own height, though inclined to stoutness, and as I looked at him, barring my exit, I noted a heavy blade hanging at his side, such a blade as I had seen carried by the men of Wilmoth's horse. For a moment we stood looking into each other's eyes, our hands on our sword-hilts, perfect silence about us, for even Rhymer had paused to stare with the others at our little tableau. The other was first to speak.

"Ah, not leaving these jolly dogs so uncere-  
moniously, are you?" he asked, and though his words were polite, the challenge behind them could not be hidden.

"But for a breath of air and a peep at the weather," I replied, searching my memory to locate that voice, for it had been in my ears before then, I would have made oath.

He laughed, but no mirth was in his tone.

"'Tis a fairish night, with the moon just peep-



ing over the woodland," he replied. "So much for that. For the breath, pray remain until we come to know each other better. How came you here?"

That I was in one of the closest places of my reckless life I fully realized, and, stepping aside, I placed my back to the wall before I replied:

"Hoity toity! My swashbuckling friend, you question as though 'twere aught of your business. 'Tis in my mind to cuff you for your insolence. But these bucks here could answer, so I will say my own say. I rode out from Philadelphia town —"

"And down here in the cut his nag saw ghosts — ha, ha! — and bolted back to town, after sprawling him in the dust. Ho, ho!" The tipsy knave laughed at the thought.

"*He lies!*"

Instantly my rapier flashed from its scabbard and there was a clatter as every rascal of them came to his feet, but quickly as I had drawn, the man in the doorway had bared his blade no less tardily.

"I found this fellow's horse tied in the wood below here, and I swear those fine feathers are false plumage. Men, before you stands a cornered rat — a spy from Washington!"

The flesh of me grows cold even now when I recall that moment. The faces about me darkened with a sudden storm of passion, and a low, muttering growl arose as they moved as though to assail me. But I waited not. With a spring, I played my rapier so close to the circle of faces that they dropped back a pace, and then with another bound I was back to my position against the wall.

“Aye, shrink back, you buzzards, and have a care how you list to the chattering of such magpies as he!”

’Twas my purpose to taunt him into attacking me, for such was my confidence in my wrist and arm that I believed I could vanquish him with the others driven back, but he made no reply, save to turn and whisper a few words to one of his fellows, who nodded and left the room, and a moment later I heard his heavy soles on the stairway. Rhymer now clicked his cricket and, shuffling his feet, began chanting:

“When a big storm comes in the lonesome night,  
Hi-lo-diddle-de-dee —  
It seems to me that —”

“Have done with that yawp!” exclaimed one burly ruffian, cutting short the dunce’s dance

by seizing him by the throat and hurling him aside.

By this time I had come to look for some word of warning or advice in the strange fellow's chants, and I was just turning to see where he had been flung, when I heard the unmistakable swish, swish of skirts. I faced the doorway that led to the stairs, and there before me stood Gayle Langford.

Yes, by the blood of my veins, there was the little Tory, as calm as a June evening, looking us over as though curious to know why we were there, and there were no ropes about her, nothing to indicate that she was a prisoner. As her eyes looked into mine something showed in them, but her gaze shifted too quickly for me to read the message. The man who had denounced me bowed obsequiously to her.

"Mistress Langford," he said, "will you please tell us who this man is?" He pointed to me.

I held my breath. Slowly she looked me over, while my heart beat against my ribs like a hammer.

"It is Ian Lester, a captain of Continentals!"

As I heard my doom spoke by her whom I had lost honor, aye, doubtless my life now, in serving, a bitter curse fell from my lips, and then like a thunderbolt of fury I flung myself at the fellow before me, but the knave was as quick as I, and

his blade turned aside my desperate lunge. Twice, thrice, our steel clashed, and then my rapier shattered against his heavier blade, leaving but the hilt and a stub in my hand.

"I'll kill you, you meddler!" he grated.

The light of murder shone in his eyes as he dropped the point of his sword and lunged at my heart. There was room for but a short backward spring on my part, and as I took it I struck at his weapon with my broken blade, but I knew 'twas a vain defence and that I could not turn his stroke.

But with a wild howl of terror Rhymer plunged forward as the fellow aimed the stroke, and their bodies clashed together just in time to swerve his point, and instead of spitting me it pierced my coat and scraped a rib. Rhymer seemed to have gone daft with terror, for he shrieked like some wild thing, and, recovering from the shock of the first collision, he butted headlong into the others, bowling some of them over and mixing them up into indescribable confusion. But the fellow who had assailed me was on his feet recovering himself for another lunge, when, of a sudden, Gayle Langford threw herself in front of me with upraised arms.

"Stop!" she cried. "There must be no killing!"

"Stand aside!"

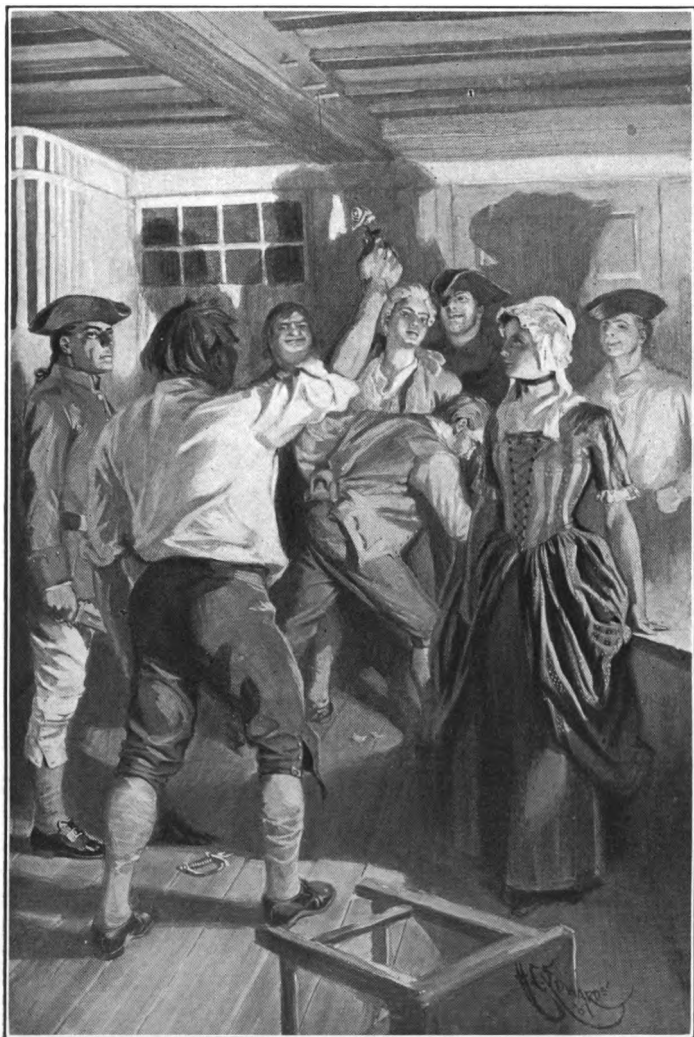
"I'll not!" and she stepped towards him.  
"You forget —"

The remainder of the sentence was spoken to him in a whisper as she leaned over his blade towards him, but since his threat, "I'll kill you, you meddler," my mind had been groping to recall where I had heard his voice and those words before, and now I remembered. The knave before me was he with whom I had fought on the veranda outside Gayle Langford's window. Doubtless he had been a guest at the house that night and had seen me there. Whatever her words were, they caused him to lower his weapon, though a protest came from the gang, who had recovered from their confusion and kicked the dunce out into the night. She turned towards them and her chin upturned a trifle.

"He is your prisoner, unarmed; take him!"

She stepped aside and they hurled themselves on to me, and though I struggled desperately 'twas soon over and I was in their hands, my clothes torn, and on the floor before me a crushed red rose that had fallen from my bosom. One of the knaves picked it up and held it aloft.

"See!" he cried. "The spy has been a wooing! Where there's a rose there has been a wench!"



“THE SPY HAS BEEN A-WOOING! WHERE THERE’S A ROSE  
THERE HAS BEEN A WENCH!” — *Page 212.*



I glanced at the girl. She stood with her eyes fixed on the remains of the flower, a dull red creeping into her cheeks.

"Thank you for tearing it out of my bosom," I said. "'Twould have burnt my flesh had it remained."



## CHAPTER XI

### THE SHADOW

**F**OR a breath there was no sound in the room, and then Gayle Langford turned away.

"I bid you good night, my loyal friends," she said, but at the stairway she paused and glanced towards me. Only for a flash did our eyes meet, and then she gathered up her skirts and ran up the stairs, a burst of laughter coming from her lips; aye, laughter that mocked me, though with all its mockery it sounded hysterical to my ears.

Around me was a semicircle of enemies, and behind me was the wall; further fighting on my part was folly, so I rearranged my clothing as coolly as I could command myself, and sat down.

"Will not some one say the word? I'm dry as a herring," I said, tilting back my chair.

Such an unexpected act and speech almost

took them off their feet, and there was a faint glint of admiration in the leader's eyes as he slapped his thigh.

"Body o' me, but you're a cool one!" he exclaimed. "A nerve like that would bring you something if you fought for the King. And why shouldn't you do something for yourself? The most you can hope for with Washington is a hangman's noose. With the King you would have something to live for — the King knows how to reward."

He paused and I sat silent. Evidently he took encouragement from this.

"Why not?" he added. "Eh, what say you?"

"Simply that I would knock you down could I reach you," I replied.

"Ho, landlord, wine for us all!" he cried, turning to the innkeeper. Then, turning to me, he added: "If you will not fight with us you shall drink with us."

"Good wine has no politics, but 'tis apt to make mortal man forget his God, his King, or his country, once it takes command of his brain. Here's hoping that when next we meet you cannot jump from the veranda!"

His cup had gone to his lips, but he lowered it,

paused, and then, raising it once more, drained it. But I knew my shot had struck home.

"Your riddles are as silly as Rhymer's," he said.

"If they be too deep for you, ask the Prince to solve them."

"Your tongue is as sharp as Mephisto's fork. Landlord, our friend wishes to retire. Show him to a nice, quiet room, and some of these other gentlemen will accompany you." Then the knave turned to me. "Will you go along peaceably or shall we do battle and bind you?" he asked.

"Think you I so greatly love your company? I prefer my prison."

As I spoke I rose to my feet and four of the fellows laid their hands on me. Mercy o' God, but my blood was near to cooking my veins, so hot it was, but for once I had kept my brains at work and made no struggle. There was a hurried consultation in whispers, and then the innkeeper took up a candle and led the way up the stairs. There was a broad landing or hallway at the top, with a room at one end and other rooms along the side. What manner of structure it was at the far end of the hall I could not tell then, for it lay in shadow.

"The end room is the one," said the landlord, pausing at its door and fumbling with his keys. "Only one window — and it is barred — with a rocky precipice below it. He'd as well cut his throat as to try that window."

"And a gallant buck with a bit o' steel will stay close outside the door here to keep him from gettin' too lonesome," responded one of the roughs, and the others chuckled.

The innkeeper threw open the door. "Walk right in," he said, bowing in mock servility. "An' may it please your —"

"Ah, gentlemen, so that is to be the rebel's quarters?"

'Twas a woman's voice that interrupted, and, wheeling about I saw Gayle Langford standing in the doorway of the room at the other end of the hall, a candle held aloft in her hand, and by its light I noted that another hallway led off to the left at the end.

"Yes, and you may sleep in peace, my lady, for the fellow will not cause any further bother this night."

A light laugh from the girl followed this assurance.

"I'll confess that I was curious to know where you would find a perfectly safe place for him.

He cannot escape from there?" There was a question in her tone.

For answer one fellow clapped his hand to the blade that hung at his side.

"Not unless he swallows this toothpick of mine," he said, grinning.

"Have done with your clownish jests!" I growled. "Lock the door and shut yourself from my sight."

I turned my back to the treacherous girl at the other end of the hall and walked into the room; there was another burst of laughter from her, and I heard her door shut. I heard one of the knaves catch his breath sharply, and as I looked at him I saw him gazing down the hallway, and in his eyes was that which caused me to shudder in pity for the tender-reared girl whose hatred of the Continentals was prompting her to terms of fellowship with these hell-hounds. Then I looked about me. In one corner stood a bed, and beside it a heavy chair, but not another stick of furniture was there in the room.

"Sweet dreams o' Washington," called one as the door was banged shut behind me, leaving me in darkness.

But scarcely had the key turned in the lock than I had sprung to the door and had my ear

close to the keyhole. I heard the laugh that followed the parting jest and then the clatter of their heavy feet as they went down the stairs, calling back to the one on guard to " slit the spy " if he caused trouble.

They were gone, but I was not left in entire darkness, for a tiny ray of light peeped in where some hand in other days had whittled a small crescent-shaped place on the edge of the door close to the lock. Doubtless some other prisoner had begun carving his way to freedom, but evidently his work had been soon interfered with.

That ray of light held small attraction for me, and I left the door and went to the window, where the moon was peeping in at me. The window was heavily barred, but I could look out on a scene of quiet beauty, where the rugged hills that bordered the Schuylkill were softened by the moonlight, and seemed to be a part of another world, a world of peace and glory; a world where there was no demand called duty that cried for the heart's blood; a world where God smiled and there was no war.

I peered down through the bars. The inn-keeper had spoken truly. That portion of the tavern was built out to the edge of a precipice, and some distance below I could see the rocks.

And right over there was the river — the river where I had rowed her to safety. Aye, up that river I had toiled, passing this very inn in the darkness of a stormy night, and now within a hundred yards of its banks she had betrayed me! But it had not been all in vain, after all, for had I not met Mary Wilmoth? Ah, 'twas worth the toil at the oars, worth betrayal unto death to know for even so short a time a maid like her. Even now I could hear her voice out in the moonlit world singing.

“My lover is a soldier lad,  
King George's crown he's scorning.”

'Twas a pretty conceit of my fancy and I gave myself up to it, and then I forgot the song, and worshipped the vision the moonlight gave me. Long I stood there, staring at Fancy's picture, until I was suddenly aware that the image of the Patriot maid had faded, and, in its stead, I was kneeling in reverence to another picture, and in the image was the glint of copper-tinted tresses, the haughty, imperious face of — There was a burst of drunken laughter from below, and up the stairs came the chorus of a drinking song. I heard my guard tramping restlessly for a few moments, and then he paused. I crept to the

door and peeped through the crevice. It was about on a line with the middle of the hall and gave me a good view. I could see the candle resting on the shelf a short distance down the hall, and leaning against the wall was the imp who guarded me, holding in his hand a flask, which I saw go to his lips often. Again the roisterers below raised their voices in carousal and I saw the guard take a few steps towards the stairway and stand as though listening to his fellows.

Then my gaze wandered past him, down the hall, to where the shadows lurked about Gayle Langford's room, and I was about to turn away when I felt my heart leap, and an exclamation reached my lips, but was choked there.

Dimly outlined in the shadows at the far end of the hall was a form. I strained my eyes. 'Fore God, I could not be mistaken! No! It was moving, creeping towards me, crouching close to the wall, but steadily creeping nearer, nearer, noiseless as some spirit from the pit of darkness. I looked towards the guard. His back was partially turned towards the creeping shadow, and he was intent on hearing the carousal of his mates.

Almost breathless, and with my heart thumping against my ribs till it seemed it must be heard,



I turned to watch that which was coming out of the gloom. And now the faint gleam of the candle glanced on something bright, and I knew it to be steel. Man it was that was creeping out of the shadows! That I could now tell, though the head and shoulders were so muffled in a cape that the features could not be seen. But in his hand was a naked blade. A thrill of exultant joy shot me through and through. It could mean but one thing — an attempt to rescue me! Where that nameless one had come from was beyond my ken, but from out of the night help was creeping to me. Could it be that Rhymer had gained entrance and was risking his life for mine?

Fascinated, I knelt there in the darkness and watched, but there was something so uncanny about it that I came near to being seized with a delirium of fear, though the unknown could not mean harm to me. How close could Tragedy creep before discovery? Such a strain my nerves had never before known, and God grant that I may never again be called upon to undergo such moments of suspense.

Only about fifteen feet now separate the two in the hallway! Closer, closer! Twelve feet! The cape is drawn more carefully about the face, and the sword arm is being extended! Ten feet!

Broth o' the witches, but my eyes will drop out of their sockets soon! Another outburst from below and the guard turns.

Like a flash the crouching figure leaps forward, and his naked blade glitters in a desperate lunge. But the distance is a fraction too great. There is a wild cry of alarm from the guard as he throws himself aside barely in time to escape the other's steel. Then as the Shadow recovers, the guard draws and for an instant they pause, but only for the space of a breath, for, lithe as a panther, the Shadow springs forward once more, and a spark flies from the clash of steel.

Click! Click! Is-s-s-sh, click! How they fought! But never a glimpse of the face of the Shadow could I get for the low drawn hat and the folds of the cape draped about the left arm and held high. He was only a youth; that I could tell; but that he was the better sword was evident to my practised eye in the second encounter, and the knave of a guard quickly knew it, too, for he fought on the defensive, desperately striving to keep that circling, flashing blade from his vitals, but ever it played closer and closer, until the look of horror on the cutthroat's face as I saw it once in the candle-light told me that already he felt the hand of death clutching at him. That the

cry of alarm had not been heard below was evident, for the carousing continued. Could the youth's strength but last 'twould soon end, but now the guard raised his voice again and again in wild screams. They were his death-signal. Desperately the Shadow thrust, parried, and lunged. The drunken howls below ceased. In a moment they would be pouring up the stairs, and I — dolt! — had been kneeling spellbound at the crevice. The chair! With a bound, I had clutched it, and then, rushing back, I swung it with all of my strength against the panels of the door. Crash! Crash! A jagged, splintered hole showed, and as I swung the chair aloft for another blow my gaze passed through the splintered panel and saw the Shadow's sword suddenly flash past the other's guard ; there was a scream of agony, and the knave, clutching at his breast, reeled and plunged face downward to the floor, but even as he was reeling, the Shadow had sprung past him and was working desperately with the key. I dropped the chair and seized the knob, only to find a flood of maledictions crowding my tongue as I realized after a moment of endeavor that my blows had sprung the lock and the key would not turn. And now there was a rush of feet below, and I heard the stair door below swung open.

"Out of the way, friend!" I cried. "The lock is sprung, but I'll batter it down!"

Even as I spoke I was swinging the heavy chair aloft. There was not a word from the Shadow, but through the broken panel I saw the unknown whirl and dash back down the hallway, sweeping the candle from the shelf with his sword as he passed. But his purpose of plunging the hall into darkness failed, for the blaze clung to the candle-wick in spite of the fall, and the candle lay spluttering on the floor.

I paused not to watch the flight of the Shadow, but attacked the door with all of the strength my desperation gave me. Alas! 'Twas all in vain, that gallant fight by the Shadow and my hammering of the door, for into the hall sprang the rest of the gang. I dropped my chair and almost sobbed in my despair.

"Furies o' hell! What means this?" shouted the foremost, snatching up the candle from the floor and looking about.

There was a groan from my late guard, and they were quickly at his side and raising his head. Then they saw the splintered door.

"The damned rebel has escaped! Quick, which way did he go?" cried the leader.

In the darkness of my prison I crouched and

harked to it all, peering out through the splintered panels.

"Speak! Curse it, man, speak before you die!"

The wounded man slowly raised one hand and pointed down the hall.

"There! Into — that room — at the end —!"

"Not that room, man! Not that room! 'Tis the girl's room! Think again!" And he poured whiskey down his throat.

"I am — certain. I saw — him — the — candle on — the — floor. That room!"

One of them had come to my room and was working at the door.

"Why, this door is still locked!" he exclaimed.

"It wasn't the — rebel — He's still — there — The devil sent — an — imp from — the dark. And — there!" Again the trembling hand pointed down the hall.

With a curse, they dropped the dying man and rushed pell-mell, candles, swords, and pistols in hand, down the hall, where they seized the knob of Gayle Langford's door. Finding it locked, they beat on the panels with pistol butts until I thought those panels, too, would be shattered.

"Ho, within! Ho, there!" They shouted.

"In mercy's name, gentlemen, what causes such uproar?" came the response I knew to be Gayle Langford's.

"Open at once or we'll break in!" commanded the leader.

"How dare you be so insulting!" flashed back the reply in her haughtiest tone. "I am dressing, and he who dares to force an entrance will find a hot bullet awaiting him."

"But you had better hurry. There may be an assassin hiding in your room."

A half-suppressed scream came from beyond the door.

"In a moment — just a moment!" she said, tremulously.

But almost as she spoke I heard the key click in the lock, the door swung open, and in the candle-light she stood before them all, her clothing but illy arranged, her hair tumbling as though she had just sprung from her bed, but with it all she was the proud, imperious daughter of Peter Langford, the aristocrat, and the flash of her eyes commanded even them who confronted her.

"And now may I be given an explanation?" she asked.

"Our mate on guard at the rebel's door has been done to death" (I saw the girl clasp her

hands as though in fear or horror at the tragedy), "and he swears that the fellow came into this room."

"Father of mercy! Do search quickly! But, pshaw! The poor fellow was mistaken, for my door was locked."

"But he vows —"

"Delirium distorts, you know. You can see there is not a closet in the room, and if he is not under the bed" (I saw them stoop and peer around) "he is not here. That window will not raise, for I tried it when I retired, so he could not have unlocked my door, locked it again, and then jumped out of the window."

One of the men advanced farther into the room, and a moment later I heard him saying, "The girl's right. The window is stuck fast."

"The — the — man — must have dodged down this hallway," said the girl.

"Two of you go back to the rebel's cage, and the rest follow me," was the chief's command, and they obeyed.

Holding their candles high, and peering nervously this way and that as though fearful that some sudden Terror would pounce upon them, they came slowly back down the hall, and actuated by a sudden impulse of humor, I placed my lips

close to the shattered panel, gave the door-knob a vicious rattle, and shouted:

"Hands up, you dogs!"

The effect was all I could have wished. The candle clattered to the floor, and so near were they ready to swoon with fright that one jerked the trigger of his pistol and sent a ball into the floor. The sense of humor has ever been a saving grace with me, and it came to the relief of my overtaxed nerves now and sent me rolling in a paroxysm of laughter.

The shot recalled the others, and I heard them coming down the hall on the run.

"What now?"

I peered out through the splintered panel once more. The mystified and demoralized twain had recovered the candle and were standing and looking about as though ready to bolt and run at the next alarm.

"The cursed place is haunted," replied one.  
"I'll swear I heard —"

"And so did I," broke in the other. "A voice right by us yelled for —"

"But who fired that shot?" was the demand.

They looked at one another a moment.

"Reckon I must have," said one, at last, raising his pistol and examining it.



"But what were you shooting at?"

That this man was complete master of the band was evident. His words came sharp and cold, and I saw the culprit drop his head and shift his feet uneasily.

"Nothing, I reckon. You see, I pulled the trigger by accident. Some one yelled, and —"

"And you came damned near shooting yourself," finished the leader, sarcastically. "But let's see after our mate yonder."

I watched them come to the fallen one and bend over him, one of them placing a flask between his lips. The leader placed his hand over the heart.

"Don't waste that whiskey," he said. "This man's dead."

The heartless, unconcerned manner of the fellow sent a shudder through me. Hardened as I was by many months of battle and bloodshed, I had never before seen any man stand in the presence of death without softening a shade, and as I harked now to this speech I drew a swift mental picture of the pleasure the speaker would take in murdering me. Why I had been spared this long I had no idea. Something the girl had whispered had saved my life, though for how long, I had no way of judging, and I was not to be left long to my own thoughts.

"Open the door and let's take a look at that rebel."

I thought it time to speak.

"Thanks," I called. "It's monstrous lonesome in here when there's so much doing right close."

The rascals were working at the lock and cursing at every twist, until finally the key turned, the door swung open, and I stood before them, my arms folded, looking from one to the other as calmly as I could, though, in truth, I kept a wary glance on all of them lest some treacherous thrust end my soldiering then and there.

"Ah, you are still here, I see," said the spokesman.

"Sorry I can't lie out of it," I replied, not moving from the doorway.

"What can you tell us of this?" was the demand, his finger pointing to the corpse.

"First of us to the worms — and the hangman cheated!" I exclaimed.

"But who did it?"

"I wish I knew."

The earnestness of my speech convinced him that I was speaking the truth, and I saw a look of utter perplexity come over his face.

"It's strange where the devil's imp came from and how he escaped."

"But now that he has escaped — and I haven't — 'twould be most kind of you to let me finish this vexatious night peacefully in bed."

I yawned as I spoke, for now that the excitement was past I was feeling the need of rest. The leader stood scowling at me for some time without speaking, and I knew that he was wrestling with my fate as his problem, but at last he ordered me back into the room where I had been, and I went cheerfully, not caring what arrangements they made for guarding me. I was worn out and wanted only to rest and to let the morrow bring its own suggestions to me, and so it was that when they closed the battered door behind me I did not take the trouble to peek out through the holes to see what they did. Instead, I threw myself on the bed and soon was sleeping soundly, sleeping as only a wearied man could to whom stirring adventures were no uncommon thing.

My slumber was unbroken until I felt a rough hand on my shoulder and I opened my eyes to see that it was broad day. Two of the knaves were standing by my bed.

"Lor', we thought ye was dead, ye was that

hard to wake," said one. "Jest ye huff yerself out o' that bed an' come with us."

"Come where?"

By this time I was fully awake and was rising from the bed.

"Goin' ter put ye in another room—the wench's room," he added, winking at his mate.

I stared at them, and the look that must have been on my face caused them mirth, for they chuckled.

"Thought he'd look better pleased, even if she is Tory, didn't ye, Bill?"

"Can't never tell how these lace an' ruffles fellers feels by the way they looks," was the reply.

"Now, look here," exclaimed the first, when I told them I was ready. "We're goin' to take ye to another room, an' if ye try to give us the leg ye'll find a heap o' lead scorchin' yer ribs." He held up his cocked pistol as he spoke.

"Then I'll not try to run," I answered.

Each took hold of an arm, and with drawn pistols they marched me out into the hall. Instantly my eyes sought the room at the far end. The door was open, and for some reason I was glad. I glanced towards the stairway. Both saw the look and their grasp tightened on my arm, while their pistols were raised threateningly.

"Don't try it!"

I laughed. "Not I — with the promise of your lead."

They shoved me rather roughly into the room lately occupied by Gayle Langford and pulled the door shut behind us. I glanced about the room. The bed was neatly made up and there was not a sign that it had been occupied recently. Besides the bed, there was no article of furniture save two chairs in the room.

"Ye'll spend the day — maybe longer — here, so get comfortable," said one. "An' as I'm to stay in the room to see that ye don't fall out the window, ner nothin' like that, I'll jest take a chair myself."

He sat down in one corner near the door, and rested his pistol on his lap, and his companion, after a brief whispered conference with him, left the room. I walked to the one window and looked out on the plaza in front of the inn, the Philadelphia road lying just beyond. One of the panes of glass in the window was broken, evidently recently.

"It seems to have been a disastrous night for mine host's property," I said, pointing to the jagged piece of glass sticking in the sash.

"The wench did that this morning. Upset a

chair against it somehow. Tried to catch the chair and ripped a gash into her hand. It bled like fury, but she laughed about it. Devilish shame to let a wench like that go away without a good lovin'."

At that moment I saw several horses being led around to the plaza, and I caught my breath a little sharply, I suspect, when I observed a side-saddle on one of the beasts, and then out of the inn came the riders, the gang of cutthroats with Gayle Langford in their midst, and her merry laugh was sounding above the babble of rough raillery.

"Ain't it a cussed shame to be stuck here while the rest of 'em hits the road for Philadelphia?"

My guard was standing close behind me, but as I looked around, I saw the pistol pointing menacingly towards me. I made no answer, but turned once more to the window. I saw the leader nod towards the hostler, and the animal with the side-saddle was led to where the girl stood. The leader bowed to her, offered his hand as a stirrup, and the next moment she had sprung lightly to the saddle. She looked bewitching in the morning sunlight, sitting her horse as easily and gracefully as she would have sat in one of the Langford parlor chairs, and now as she

gathered up the reins I noticed for the first time that a band of white was about her left hand. The others swung into their saddles, and as the girl's horse suddenly backed and whirled, as though a result of the confusion, she was brought facing squarely towards my window. It was for only an instant, but in that breath her eyes had been raised and they flashed a look directly into mine as I stood pressing my face against the glass. At the same instant she raised her left hand slightly and then dropped it quickly to the reins. 'Twas a brief gesture, but I noted that the bandage about her hand was stained with red, and I would have sworn that the look and the raising of the hand were not mere chances. They were purposely given, I was sure.

Then they rode away, the girl and the chief bringing up the rear, and as they started, Gayle Langford's mount seemed seized with a sudden desire to dash away to the left. Then she clutched the reins in her right, and swung the animal back towards her evil companion, but as she did so I saw her left hand drop to her skirt and a red-stained kerchief fluttered from the hand to the ground. This was not seen by her companion, for the girl had regained control of her horse and had cut him with the whip, sending him thunder-

ing away, with the astonished knave riding hard to keep at her horse's heels.

"Those precious friends of yours are apt to run into a squad of Continental soldiers on that road," I said, turning to my jailer.

"Which is the reason they will leave it a little farther on and take another road to town."

He grinned complacently as he gave me this reply. I tramped the floor awhile, the fellow watching me closely, and always when I glanced at him I saw the muzzle of his pistol covering me, until finally I threw myself on the bed and gave myself up to bitter reflections. And the face of Gayle Langford looked at me from the walls, the ceiling, the air — looked at me and scoffed at me; looked at me and smiled at me; looked at me and baffled me. Was there ever such a living enigma as this little Tory? Why did she cause her horse to shy away at the start? and why did she drop the kerchief from her wounded hand? Pah! What was the use of trying to fathom the subtleties of the sex? Like a will-o'-the-wisp they led one on with their vagaries and allurements until one found quicksand beneath one's feet, and then each succeeding struggle plunged the poor fool the deeper, while still the face of the woman danced about in his brain — or was it



really glowing out there — there! — over there! — now up there! — now over here! — there! — there! — there?

There was a movement on the part of the guard, and as I looked at him I saw that he was listening intently. I came to my feet, also, for in my ears was a distant and faint thud, thud, thud! The guard sprang to the window and stood for a moment with his ear close to the broken pane. Then he turned to me.

“Horses — on the gallop, too, by God!”

It was true. The pounding of the hoofs was unmistakable now. That the guard realized the possibilities of it was evident by the uneasy look he turned on me, but unmindful of his ugly pistol, I pushed my way in front of him and pressed my face to the glass again, straining to catch the first glimpse of the horsemen riding so furiously from Philadelphia way. Behind me, peering over my shoulder, was the guard, his eyes fixed on the road. Then I gasped with delight, for, sweeping into view came a squad of cavalry in the buff and blue of the Continental army.

I felt the cold muzzle of the pistol against my temple, and the voice of the guard came to me, hoarse and raspingly:

“Down on your knees, an’ if ye make a move

or a sound I'll splatter your brains over this room!"

There was no choice. I went to my knees, my eyes just clearing the window-sill. I looked into the eyes of the knave standing over me and what I saw there sent a chill to my heart. He had drawn away from the window, but we could both see without being seen. I heard a word of command and the pace was slackened, and now I could see that riding with the troopers was a negro boy — Putnam, by the heavens! And there was another not in uniform. Surely it was — yes, he turned his head just then — it was Boyd. What did it mean? Of a truth, I was believing just then that it meant death for me.

At a brisk trot the little squad turned from the road and rode up to the inn. I saw them draw rein and the innkeeper hurry out to meet them.

"Keep down!" snarled my guard.

Crouching thus, I could not see the scene below, but through the broken window I heard the sound of voices, though I could not distinguish the words. Then there was a clatter of horses' hoofs again.

"Good!" breathed the guard.

I dared to risk raising my head a trifle, and

saw the squad striking spurs and riding away towards Valley Forge while the innkeeper stood waving his hand in that direction. I almost groaned in my despair. Putnam was riding ahead now, and Boyd, who had lingered to adjust his saddle girth, was spurring after them when I saw him suddenly draw rein and spring to the ground. Then he picked up something and shouted to his companions. His cry was heard, and as the troopers turned in their saddles, Boyd waved aloft something white and red-stained. Then back came those blessed fellows. Below stairs I heard doors slamming violently. In front, Boyd was pointing to the blood-stained handkerchief and then to the inn, and I saw hands going to pistol holsters.

“Damn ye — they’ll have to dig a grave for ye, now!”

The rascal’s eyes were bloodshot, and I closed my eyes as he swung the muzzle of the pistol towards my head.

“Don’t shoot! Are ye crazy, man?”

The cry came from the far end of the hall, and we saw the innkeeper running towards us.

“Crazy? Yes,—to kill this damned rebel!”

“And have the soldiers here in a trice at the sound of the shot? Man, ye’d hang us both!

Hold that gun on him while I bind his hands. There! Now this pillow-slip into his mouth, so. I've bolted the doors below. That'll stop 'em for a minute. We can get out the back way to the stables. They'll all rush into the house in front. Run for it!"

The knave with the pistol saw the weight of the landlord's words, for even as the one was binding my hands the other was gagging me with a pillow-slip, and then they dashed out of the room, only pausing to turn the key in the lock. Even then I heard a pistol-butt beating on the door below. I got to my feet and ran to the window as there came a crash, and I knew the door had been forced. Below, I could hear the soldiers running through the rooms, jerking tables and chairs about, and, kicking out the sash of the window, I hurried back to the door and began kicking at it. Up the stairs I could hear them coming, and my heart leaped with joy.

"Who is in there?" came the challenge.

'Twas impossible for me to reply, but I kicked at the door harder than ever.

"There's no key here," I heard a voice say, and then came the call: "Stand aside, in there. We'll smash the door."

Then came the impact of heavy bodies against the door, once, twice; it yielded; into the room poured men in the uniform I loved, and with them was Richard Boyd.

## CHAPTER XII

### A MESSAGE IN RED

**I**T oftentimes chances in the telling of a tale that one must take that told by others and weave it in, and so I must at this point tell to you that which was told to me by my friend, Boyd, after our meeting at the Red Fox inn.

When the bells sounded the tidings of independence on July fourth Boyd was on the streets, but towards evening, when the lawless element began to hold sway, he went to his lodgings and remained there, unconscious of the tragedy that was visiting the house of his former friend, Peter Langford. He heard the shouts of the rabble, and sorrowed that Patriots would have to blush for the evils of those first riotous hours.

I had promised to meet him at the Golden Lion the next morning, at which time he was to be ready to ride with me to Washington, and at the appointed hour he was there, ready to fare forth into the new life, but the Captain of Con-

tinentials did not appear. Had the landlord seen aught of him? No, the Captain's horse was still in the stable and he had not showed his face about the inn during either the night or morning.

Fuming with impatience, Boyd's suspicions soon were whispering to him. That Tory maid — and the rose! Many a man had yielded all because of pink flesh and a smile! Another hour passed. Exhausted with the carousal of the night before, Philadelphia was abnormally quiet that morning, and the calm irritated Boyd.

Standing before the inn, he suddenly smote fist to palm and then started briskly in the direction of the Langford residence. Everywhere were groups discussing the Declaration, and not all of the Patriots believed the Congress had chosen wisely. Reaching the entrance to the Langford grounds, he paused and surveyed the premises. Not a sign of life was to be seen about the place, but the front doors were standing open, and he strode forward, and then halted, astounded, as he noted that the massive doors were battered and hanging awry on their hinges. At the threshold he stood uncertain, bewildered, and then he saw, coming down the great hallway, an old negro, his hands crossed behind his back, his head bent low, and his steps slow.

"Erasmus," he called, recognizing the servant. The negro stopped and raised his head.

"Yes, suh, yer su'vent, suh," and Erasmus bowed.

"Tell Mr. Langford I wish to see him."

The negro advanced slowly to the doorway.

"I cain't tell him, suh — I cain't tell him nuffin' till de good Lord done tell ol' 'Rasmus ter lay aside dis ol' body."

"You mean —"

"I means, suh, dat Marse Langford done leave dis worl'. He died yesterday."

"Yesterday? When? How?"

"Jes' when dat bell ring in de steeple de Lord He lay His hand on Marse Langford an' 'twas all over in a bref or two, suh, — only a bref or two."

Boyd stood silent a moment, while the darky again dropped his head, and, crossing his hands behind his back, swayed his body to and fro, muttering unintelligible words.

"And what of his daughter?" Boyd asked, at last.

Erasmus raised his head and looked steadily at the questioner.

"'Scuse me, suh, 'scuse me; ol' 'Rasmus don'



want ter be 'pertinent, suh, but I'se 'bleeged ter ask ye whyfore ye ask that? "

" Oh, for no reason, especially. Probably I asked the wrong question. Listen, did you see a young man, a stranger, here last night? — you surely remember him, Erasmus, the soldier who gave the toast to Washington at the banquet. Think, did you see him last night or this morning? "

" What? Marse Ian? Why — "

But the negro suddenly clicked his jaws together and stood silent, a peculiar light shining in his eyes.

" Yes, yes! " exclaimed Boyd. " Ian Lester, a Patriot soldier, it was. Go on, Erasmus, go on. Where is he now? "

There was no reply save a shake of the head.

" Well, speak! Is he here? Can't you speak? "

Erasmus uncrossed his hands and rested them on his hips.

" Yes, suh, I reckon I can speak, an' I speaks now, suh. Yes, suh, I speaks now an' tells you dat maybe Marse — dat man — is hyar, — an' maybe he ain't hyar. Dar, suh, I done spoke."

" Devil take you! " blazed Boyd. " If you don't tell me where he is I'll make ribbons of your black hide! "

“Mebbe so, suh, mebbe so. But dis ol’ man ain’t gwine ter tell ye nuffin’, suh, if ye ties dem ribbons tergedder befo’ my eyes. Ye done knows him, suh, an’ I cain’t save him by lyin’, but de sweet ol’ Missus she a-peepin’ down from up in de skies, an’ I hear her whisperin’ to ol’ Rasse — dat what he call me — ‘Don’ ye let ’em cotch my boy, Rasse, don’ ye do it if ye die.’ An’ I ain’t gwine ter tell ye nuffin’, suh, ’bout dat boy — dat li’l’ Marse Ian what I ca’y on my back.”

As he spoke the old man’s face was raised higher and higher until he was looking up towards heaven, and his arms were outstretched as though reaching towards some one above. Boyd felt a sudden moisture in his eyes, and his hand fell on the servant’s shoulder with a kindly grip.

“Why, God bless your faithful old heart, I don’t understand all that you are saying, but I understand that you are trying to shield Captain Lester from his enemies. It is glorious of you, but I am his friend — and I am seeking him. Tell me, now, where can I find him?”

The old man suddenly lowered his arms until they were on a level with the other’s head, his hands partly raised near Boyd’s face, and between

his hands he peered long and searchingly at the man before him.

" Marse Ian's friend? His friend? How come it, suh? How come it? I'se a poor ol' niggah, suh, but don' lie ter me dat ye are Marse Ian's friend if ye ain't. Don' do it, suh; don' do dat!" There was a pathetic note of pleading in his voice.

Boyd urged and argued and swore his friendship, and finally Erasmus led the way to the reception-room and recited to him the events following the death of Peter Langford.

" De servants all done run away, suh, an' I ain't seen none of 'em since. I'se de only one what's left ter care fer de ol' Missus Langford, suh. She done come home dis mornin' an' ol' Rasmus de only one hyar ter tell her dat Marse Langford dead. She up-stairs now wif dat poor clay."

" And you have no idea where Lester has gone? "

" No, suh, but he was er fightin' fer de sweet young Missy when I seed him last, an' I hears de trash say dey done 'scape by a winder, an' den de trash runs all over de house an' steals all dey can carry, but when dey comes ter Marse Langford's body I tells 'em de wrath o' God gwine ter

git 'em if dey tech him, an' den dey swears an goes away."

"And no trace of Lester to be found!" Boyd was tramping the floor.

"No, suh, but Marse Ian fight fer de young Missy, an' Marse Ian he gwine ter keep her safe an' bring her back bimeby. He gwine ter bring her back safe."

He walked slowly to the window and looked out as though expecting to see his Marse Ian leading the girl up to the house at that moment.

Boyd left the house soon afterwards and spent the day hovering about the Golden Lion. The hours dragged by wearily for him, but he waited until near sunset before again calling at the Langford place. Friends of the family were in evidence now, their gorgeous equipages being drawn up in front of the house. He was well known to many of them, and to him the Tories were bitter in their ragings against the work of the mob, and in all sincerity he agreed with them. Woe had come to the place, of a surety, — the master dead, the daughter driven to flight and still strangely missing, the doors battered down, and the rooms pillaged. Seeing Erasmus passing down the hallway, Boyd hurried after him, and drawing

him into a secluded corner, he looked him full in the face.

"Well?" he said.

The servant shook his head. "Only de good Lord knows what become o' Marse Ian' an' de young Missy. Only de good Lord knows, 'cause we ain't heerd er whisper from 'em — not er whisper."

Boyd pondered a moment. "And the Prince — what of him?"

"Dat man he don' let himself be foun' when de ragin' debils came batterin' at de doors, but to-day he done come snufflin' an' a-moanin' aroun' whar de ol' Missus be, an' he tell her how he gwine ter miss ol' Marse Langford, an' how he jes' a quiverin' fer to go out an' fight a passel o' rebels an' bring Missy Gayle back."

The contempt of the servant for the Hessian was so overpowering that even his lifetime of training as a vassal who had no right to think was swept away.

"Does he know that Captain Lester took the girl away?"

"I'se most suhten he does, suh, but he let on like he not hyar when de mob come. But he tell ol' Missus dat he jus' know dat rebel Captain egg de mob on ter smash in so he could steal de

young Missy. O Lord, if Marse Ian ever hear o' dat he gwine ter stick er sword through dat man fer such scan'lous talk. An' ol' 'Rasmus had ter rassle wid de spirit when he heerd him say dem words, fer dese ol' black hands jest natch'lly kept er jerkin' an' er jerkin' fer ter choke him."

Boyd returned to the inn and again began the weary wait. Another day dawned, but no news came from the missing ones, and in the evening when he called at the Langford place, he found Mrs. Langford in a state of well-bred, fashionable hysterics over the absence of the daughter, while the Prince stalked about the place swearing that it should be the work of his life to avenge the Langford wrongs. The body of Peter Langford, after being prepared for burial, was resting amid a mocking splendor, the funeral being postponed in the hope that some tidings could be learned of the missing daughter. The authorities had looked profound and had said, "Hah!" several times when the story of Gayle Langford's disappearance had been poured into their ears, but not the slightest clue could be obtained.

It was the following morning that Boyd, racked by doubts and fears, found a new plan forming in his mind, the idea being the result of seeing a trooper riding by. Hurrying to the

guard headquarters, he sought out the officer in command and poured into his ears the story of the disappearance of Captain Lester, courier of his Excellency, General Washington.

The effect was most satisfactory. Orders were at once issued to every squad in the city to make diligent search for the missing one, and troopers scoured the country surrounding Philadelphia, but when the sun went down on the evening of the seventh of July there were no tidings of the lost ones. Unable to remain idle longer, Boyd mounted his horse that evening and joined the squad of Wilmoth's men, and again every conceivable nook of the city was searched, but when the first cock crew just before the dawn the little squad of troopers sat in their saddles in silent realization of defeat. The sergeant broke the silence at last.

"Either the Captain is a dead man, or —" He paused and looked toward Boyd.

"Or what?" demanded Boyd, sharply, seeing the other hesitate.

"Well, I'm not the man to blame a hot-blood for forgetting when such a devilish fetching wench smiles."

Boyd made no reply. He was seeing again a red rose on a satin lapel, and the flutter of a

dainty kerchief from the gold-panelled windows of a coach.

“ Hark! ”

One of the men had spoken, and as they quieted their stamping mounts and kept perfect silence there came to them from out of the distance a faint thudding. In an instant one had thrown himself from his saddle and had his ear to the ground.

“ It’s a horse, and it’s coming like hell! ” he cried.

A few hurried words of command and the squad was spread out, fan-like, to intercept the oncoming animal, whose hoof-beats were now becoming plain.

“ No shooting unless you have to, ” commanded the sergeant. “ If he doesn’t halt, catch the bridle if you can. If not — shoot. ”

There was something ghost-like about it all. Nearer and nearer sounded those flying hoofs, and near him in the darkness Boyd could see here and there, troopers, firm-seated, reins taut, ready to dash after the unknown one if he got by them. Now the thunder of the hoofs sounded almost in their midst, but the pall of darkness still hid the animal from view. Only a moment ’twas thus, and then from out of the gloom they saw a horse



coming on at a furious gallop, and indistinctly outlined on its back was a crouching figure.

"Halt!"

No answer, and no slacking of the headlong pace.

"Halt! Halt, or we'll fire!"

There was an inarticulate cry from the figure on the horse's back, but the beat of the iron-shod hoofs never slacked.

"Charge!" shouted the sergeant as the strange rider and his steed came abreast. "Catch that bridle!"

Spurs sank, and there was a wild rush of steeds, a bit of cursing, a howl that could mean naught but terror, and the man who had withdrawn farthest down the road had succeeded in clutching the bridle of the strange horse and was checking the animal. Then they all came riding back to where the sergeant and Boyd sat their horses.

"Here he is, sergeant — a little nigger, by the — Hi! Catch him, there!"

Like a flash, the figure had sprung from the horse's back and had made a dash into the gloom, but a trooper went plunging after him, and soon came dragging him back, though the little prisoner fought, squirmed, howled, and twisted until the rest of the squad roared with laughter.

"Where in the name of Satan were you going at that pace?" demanded the sergeant.

"Goin' ter de city," was the sullen reply.

"For what?"

"Fer to git away, suh."

"Away from what? Come, speak out!"

"From de debils what hopped out an' 'gin ter shoot dis way an' dat way an' ebery which way. Good Lord, dey done kill ever'budy but me, I 'spect!"

"And who are you?"

"Me? I'se Putnam — Maj'h Wilmoth's Putnam, suh."

The name of Wilmoth was magic to those men, and it took but a few moments to convince the little negro that he was in the hands of his master's soldiers. He knew the uniform and shouted, "Thank de Lord!" over and over until he was hushed and told to give his story. And this he did in a blundering sort of way. He told of the strange man and the strange lady coming to Wilmoth's home. He told of the attack on the party near the Red Fox inn the afternoon previous, and how, in the general confusion, he had sprung from the chaise and rolled into a hollow, and from there he had crept into the wood and hidden himself until there were no longer any sounds of

the fight, and then he had started to crawl back to the road, but the sight of men at work with shovels, digging trenches for the dead, had caused him to again seek his place of concealment, where he had remained hidden until night had fallen. What had been the fate of Major Wilmoth or Gayle Langford he did not know.

After night had fallen he had started to make his way on foot to Philadelphia, as that was closer than the Wilmoth home at Valley Forge. He lost his way and wandered about most of the night, and then, coming to a farmhouse by the main road, his weariness and the terrors through which he had passed overcame his scruples and he crept into the stable and led out a horse. Springing to its back, he made a dash for Philadelphia to spread the alarm.

Despatching a courier to headquarters with the news, the sergeant ordered Putnam to lead the way back over the road he had come, and in a few moments they were galloping towards the scene of the ambush. In the gray of dawn they searched the spot, but there was nothing but patches of fresh dirt to be found, here and there, and even that would escape ordinary scrutiny owing to the rocks and leaves that had been scattered over the graves of horses and men. Then it was mount

and away once more, and there was a grim purpose in the breasts of those hardy men as they galloped up to the Red Fox inn, weapons ready.

But the wits of the innkeeper were sharp that morning. Perceiving the soldiers dashing towards the inn, he at once surmised that the alarm had spread, and his cunning came to his rescue. Impetuously he rushed forward to meet them and forestalled their questions by wringing his hands and asking God's blessing on them for their coming. He had been compelled to give shelter to a band of ruffians, who, he verily believed, had done to death some parties unknown to him. He could give no details, but in their debauches they had hinted at murders. And, oh, could not the brave soldiers follow them and compel them to disgorge the money they had stolen from him, his savings of years? They had not been gone long, and they surely could be overtaken before they reached Valley Forge. Yes, that was the way they had gone — towards Valley Forge — and, doubtless, there would be other murders and other robberies soon if they were not run down.

'Twas a clever tale and most glibly told. The men were wild to avenge the assault on Wilmoth — mayhap his death. Hands were clutching pistol-butts as the landlord wailed out his woeful story,

and as he waved his hand towards Valley Forge the spurs sank without word of command from the sergeant, who was of a mind to search the inn, but who had not the heart to recall his men. And so they dashed away on the false scent.

As Boyd rode after them his eye glimpsed the kerchief dropped by Gayle Langford, and an impulse caused him to spring from his saddle and pick it up. There were splotches of blood on it, and he was about to cast it from him when he noticed that some of the blood stains formed letters. With a shout, he recalled the soldiers and, spreading the bit of cambric on the saddle, Boyd and the sergeant picked out rude letters, one by one, until they found the startling message:

*"Search inn."*

With a rush, they came for the door only to find it barred. Again and again the brawny men threw their weight against the door, unheeding the bruises, until the barriers gave way and they poured into the inn. What followed I have told you myself.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE KINDLING OF A FLAME

**W**HEN Wilmoth's men reached the stables after I had told them of the purpose of the innkeeper and the knave who had guarded me they found the horses gone and not a trace of the precious pair, so that pursuit was useless. Then they came back up the stairs to the room where I was relating my adventures to the sergeant and Boyd, but for some reason unknown even to myself I did not tell them that Gayle Langford had occupied the room we then were in.

"Mount, men, we ride to Valley Forge!" called the sergeant.

"But let's fire this viper's nest before we go!" exclaimed one.

The sergeant protested, but without waiting for word from his superior, the trooper had snatched the covers from the bed, and had the

tick in his arms ready to drop it on the floor, when an exclamation from Boyd caused me to turn from the window. He was staring at the bed, and there on a sheet spread over the bed-cords I saw a suit of youth's clothing and beside the clothing a naked sword.

"A pretty place to hide such a toy," said the sergeant, picking up the blade, while Boyd held up the clothing.

"What in the name of sin were they doing under the bedtick?" he asked, turning towards me.

And I? My head was bursting with the blood my thumping heart was driving through my veins. Great God! Could it really be true that the Unknown who fought and slew the guard in the hallway had run into this room, as the dying man had declared? And could it be — ? No! No! My brain whirled. But 'twas a mere stripling, lithe as a panther, I had seen fighting in the hallway! And they had searched the room soon afterwards and declared that there was no way of escape through the window.

"The man's near to a stroke," said the sergeant as I stared dazedly at the cloak and small-clothes Boyd held before me.

"Just the surprise, Sergeant, that's all," I replied. "Had I known that blade was there I

should have given the varlet who guarded me some rare entertainment."

Orders were given that there must be no destruction of property, and a little later we were mounted and pushing on towards the Wilmoth home. I was given one of the soldier's mounts while he bestrode the saddleless horse ridden by Putnam, who perched up behind the trooper. Boyd rode by my side.

"Lester," said he, "do you know whose kerchief this is?" He held out the blood-stained article to me.

"I do. It is Gayle Langford's."

"God's love!" he exclaimed.

"And I want it," I said, tucking it into my bosom.

I felt his eyes on me, but he did not speak, nor did I. In the course of time we pounded up to the Wilmoth place, and I saw Mary Wilmoth standing in the doorway. A moment later she came flying to welcome the men of her brother's command, and to me she gave her hand in warm greeting, and I bowed over the fingers and then presented Boyd. To us she gave the pleasing tidings that Major Wilmoth was improving. The iron will of the man had conquered weakness to the extent that he was able to direct mother



and sister in their ministrations, and had himself declared the wound not to be a fatal one.

'Twas God's peace to sit in that little cottage and hark to the calm tones of the snowy-haired mother as we discussed the plans for their future, for I urged that they should leave their isolated farm home and abide in Philadelphia.

"The war will be more bitter than ever," I urged, "and the attack near the Red Fox proves that roving bands of human devils are beginning to scour the country. Murder and robbery are not the worst of their crimes. Think of —"

There was a burst of merry laughter from the yard, where Boyd and Mary were strolling. I paused and glanced at Wilmoth. His eyes met mine.

"You are right, Captain," he replied.

And so it was settled that they should go on the morrow. The soldiers set to work to construct a suitable litter for their wounded commander, and I agreed to remain and see them off, after which Boyd and I would turn our faces towards New York and the Chief, I to take one of the troop horses, and my horse, in Philadelphia, to be turned over to the troop in exchange.

After the agreement I walked to the door and saw Boyd and the girl on a bench under the trees.

They made a wondrous handsome couple. He was telling her some amusing incident, for her face was beaming with humor, and as she glanced up at my approach her eyes were dancing.

"In truth, 'tis but a short cry from tragedy to mirth," I remarked.

"And perhaps as short 'twixt mirth and tragedy," replied the girl, her eyes no longer dancing. "Mr. Boyd tells me you two ride to join Washington."

"Yes, my friend is to be a pupil in the school of war."

"I hate the word," she said. "And yet, how little we know of the war here. It seems unreal to us, Captain, even though my brother is in the service, for as yet war has not come to these hills."

"But it soon will," said Boyd. "Washington is menaced at New York, and should he lose Long Island he is certain to be driven towards Philadelphia, and then these hills will be overrun with soldiers. Why, who knows but that some day I may lead a charge against a battery placed on yonder knoll." He waved his hand gaily towards the road, and laughed merrily.

"Oh, it would be awful!" she cried.

"Nay, Mistress Wilmoth, — 'twould be promotion, I hope."

"What! Not yet in uniform and dreaming of promotion?"

The shadow had gone from her eyes and her laugh rang as cheerily as before.

"Well, if ambition captures cannons, where's the harm o' the dreams?"

"La, I am sure it is proper enough to dream such dreams, and 'tis wondrous brave of you to look forward so blithely to your soldiering. Now, if 'twere Captain Lester, here, flipping a jest about charging batteries 'twould be less surprising, for he has faced them these many times and yet lives, while you —"

"May fall at the first volley," was Boyd's interruption.

The laughter died from her eyes. "I pray it prove not so," she said. "I meant only that you had yet to taste of war's bitterness."

"True, for thus far it has given me naught but its sweets."

The look of admiration the youngster turned full on her face was, of a certainty, enough to put the blushes into her cheeks, and the grace of his gallant bow, hat in right hand over his heart, sufficient to win pardon for the boldness of it. And I? I stood looking at the pretty scene — the blushing maid and the bowing cavalier —

and found myself wondering why it was that it brought no pang to me. Yestermorn I was watching with hungry eyes the color-tide in her cheeks, hanging enraptured on the lilt of her song, and near ready to compose doggerel sonnets on the splendour of her eyes. Heigho! What a fickle scamp I was, to be sure! For between my eyes and her face there was a lithe figure with naked blade playing in the candle-light, and against my heart I felt the folds of a blood-stained kerchief.

Unconsciously I fetched a long-drawn sigh, and instantly the girl flashed me a look of inquiry, and Boyd, noting my dejection, made sport of it.

"Ha! Mistress Wilmoth, see before you Captain Lester, a jesting soldier in the smoke of hostile batteries, but a doleful-faced macaroni in the midst of peace."

"I meant not to be doleful," I said, bringing a laugh, "but it saddened me to think this farm must so soon be deserted for the protection of the town. For my comrade has spoken truly — the red tide of war will surely sweep over these hills."

"This farm deserted? Protection of the town? What mean you?" cried the girl.

"'Tis decided by the chieftains of your household that you go to Philadelphia on the morrow."

I strove to inject a vein of gaiety into my speech, but I know not what manner of success I made of it, for the look of questioning alarm did not leave her face. I looked towards the house and was rejoiced to see Mrs. Wilmoth appear on the veranda.

"Your mother can best explain," I said, and the maid turned and ran to her mother, and we saw her throw herself into those sheltering arms.

Boyd and I faced about and in silence walked slowly towards the stable.

"God, but she's glorious, Lester!" he exclaimed, at last.

"Aye, glorious!" I said softly, but I meant not Mary Wilmoth.

"Did you ever see such a complexion, such eyes, such —"

"How now, friend — is it love or war on which you are bent?"

It was most bearish on my part, but the new song that had been awakened in his heart was so overpowering that he had no ears for aught else, and so my curt speech went unrebuked.

"War to-morrow, Lester; but to-day — ah, well, to-day shall be to-day!"

He closed the speech with a sigh so pregnant with tenderness that I melted and let my arm go

about his shoulders schoolboy like. And then we talked of other things.

By evening all was ready for the departure on the morrow, and though the leaving of their old home was saddening to the gentle mother and to Mary, they had been quick to recognize the stress of danger.

"I reared my children here, sir," said Mrs. Wilmoth as we sat in the candle-light. "Every board of the house is precious to me, but our leaving is but a small item of the cost being paid by our Patriots."

"But we'll come back to it some day," said the girl, "and we'll be the happier because we have helped pay for liberty."

"Could my Lord Howe have heard that speech he would take his redcoats home at once and tell King George 'twere useless to strive to conquer the Colonies!" exclaimed Boyd, his eyes feasting on her flushed face.

Late we sat talking, and when the good-nights finally were spoken Boyd glanced at the mother and bowed most profoundly to the daughter. Then as she caught up her candlestick and followed her mother into their sleeping-room he stood staring after her until with just a flash of the eyes towards him she turned and closed the

door behind her. I touched him on the arm, and without a word he followed me up the stairs.

"She said she was coming back — some day. Think you, Captain, we ever will?" he asked, after lying quiet for so long a time I had thought him asleep.

"God knows — but the memory of this bed will be cheering on many a bivouac."

"Aye, 'tis something to be able to take memory with one! And mayhap we'll come back, too — some day."

He lay quiet again, and presently by the regularity of his breathing I knew he was asleep, but to me sleep came not readily. A multitude of thoughts and fancies were scorching my brain, and before my mental vision danced two words in letters of blood — "Search inn!"

Doubtless this night Gayle Langford was lying in the shelter of her own home. And the Prince had stood by her side. The Prince! Had she not scorned him and hated him for a poltroon that night of tragedy? But doubtless he would have an explanation — and feminine hearts were ever ready to convince feminine brains that the impossible is the very probable. And Boyd had told me that the mother was more ardent in her desires for a title for her

daughter than the father had been. And so I was able to lie in that humble farmhouse and forecast with certainty that which would come to pass in a grand mansion in Philadelphia, and oddly enough in making up my forecast I mentally put it into the words of Erasmus:

“Hyar de tittle, an’ hyar Marse Langford’s money, an’ dese two dey jes’ keep a-leakin’, an’ a-leakin’, an’ a-leakin’ towards each other until bimeby dey is gwine ter git tergedder.”

The moon looked in at the window and threw a bar of light on the floor; a white curtain swayed gently in the grasp of the rose-scented breeze that stole in from the night. ’Twas God’s peace, indeed. Boyd moved and murmured something in his sleep. His words came back to me: “She said she was coming back — some day. Think you, Captain, we ever will?” My heart had gone out to the noble fellow, and should God grant me one prayer it would be that he should come back to her.

The first beams of the rising sun looked in at the window where the sprites of the moonlight had danced, and awoke me to the new day. Boyd opened his eyes soon afterward, and we at once arose, and while we were donning our clothing we heard Mary Wilmoth’s voice.



"My lover is a soldier lad,  
King George's crown he's scorning.  
He rides and fights with Washington  
In Liberty's bright morning."

I glanced at Boyd and somewhat of bitterness came to my heart as I noted the telltale flush in his cheeks, for of a truth, the Patriot maid was a delicious morsel of femininity, and I was again half-convinced that I was filled with love for her. But on my waistcoat was lying a bit of blood-stained cambric, and for a moment I forgot the singer in the mental picture of a maid who hated all that I loved and loved all I hated, a maid in whose hair were glints of copper. Ah, Mary Wilmoth might be glorious, as Boyd had declared; she might be delicious, as I had but admitted, but Gayle Langford, Royalist to the last drop of her blood, was magnificent, superb!

"Maids' hearts must break for Freedom's sake —  
Of this I give you warning —  
But the brave and true have work to do  
In Liberty's bright morning."

"On my life, 'tis a fitting song she pipes this morning," said Boyd, standing close to the window, listening.

I have ever been loth to dwell on scenes of partings, for always are they most saddening to me, even in these present days of peace. The ways of Providence are beyond our ken; we bid Godspeed and a quick return to a friend setting forth on a journey perhaps of but one day or two days by the best stage, and, lo! eternity rolls between us. So it is that I cannot look back save in tears on the parting of Boyd and myself with the Wilmoths on that July morning. The sky was cloudless, and a soft wind was stealing to us from the south; never had the birdland chorus been sweeter, never the breath of rose and honeysuckle more fragrant, nor the joy of living more masterful than in that hour which witnessed our departure.

The cavalcade went slowly because of the wounded man who rode in the rough litter, and there was somewhat of stock, for it was foreseen that chickens and cows would be valuable in Philadelphia. At the top of the hill Mary Wilmoth looked back at the old home, and when she faced to the front again tears were trembling on the long black lashes.

Boyd and I rode with them to the fork of the roads, where our ways parted. There we dismounted, and there was a brief pause given up to

hand-shakings and good-byes. Then Wilmoth gave the word and they pushed forward once more. Long we stood silent in the road, Boyd and I, watching our friends until the distance blended them into a moving speck. Then we mounted and galloped away to the east.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A BIT OF NEWS

THE notes of a bugle broke my slumbers, and my sleep-steeped senses slowly absorbed a realization that reveille was sounding, and that that bit of dirty white above me was the roof of a ragged tent. Near by, I heard the commands of sergeants preparing for the morning roll-call, and with a throb of delight I suddenly realized that 'twas all true — no trick of a dream — and that I was once more with the Continental army. Near me Boyd was sitting up and yawning.

“How do you like the bugle? 'Tis music to a soldier like me,” I said, rather boastfully in my sudden thrill.

“Well, if they're winding it just to entertain me they can spare their breath,” he replied. “And as for you, it would take a court martial to decide whether you are a soldier or a London fop.”

'Fore God, his banter hit me harder than he meant. I liked not that reference to court martial, for I had yet to face Washington and report the loss of my despatches while duelling for a Tory maid. We had been challenged by the Patriot pickets at dusk the evening before, and in due time I had established my identity, and I having vouched for my companion, we were permitted to seek my old quarters.

"Your repartee is devilish dismal," I said, gloomily.

"Confound it, man, brighten your face, can't you, if that noisy old bugle is music to you? You look as though you were ready for a stone wall, a blindfold, and a firing squad. Remember

"The brave and true have work to do  
In Liberty's bright morning."

"Aye, pipe your blithe song, my jester, but you have no disastrous failure to report to the Chief."

Filled as I was with forebodings, I could not but smile at the amazement created among my comrades when I appeared in my ruffles and silks, soiled and travel-stained. The hour for me to report to Washington came all too soon for me, and with sinking heart I was ushered into his

presence. He sat at a long table that was littered with papers, and near him was a group of officers. I caught the flash of surprise, followed instantly by a frown, as he glimpsed my garb, for I had had no chance to provide myself with uniform.

"Is this *Captain* Lester?" he asked, a note of cold sarcasm in his emphasis.

"It is, sir, though I doubt not it will not long be."

My cheeks were reddened with the disgrace of my position, and I doubt not that their flush and the regret with which my voice must have been filled touched his great heart, for his gaze softened, and then he turned to the officers.

"Gentlemen, Captain Lester has a private report to submit. May we crave your indulgence?"

Instantly they were on their feet and bowing themselves out of the room. The Chief turned to me.

"Well?" he said.

"I have failed, sir," I answered, striving to meet those steady eyes.

"I know it. What is your excuse?"

"You know it?" I cried, dumfounded.

"Why —"

"Never mind how! Your excuse!"

His voice was cold and stern. I fought a mental battle for the space of half a minute while he watched me silently.

"None, sir," I finally responded, though the words were but little more than a whisper.

"You have the effrontery to report the loss of your despatches and have no excuse?"

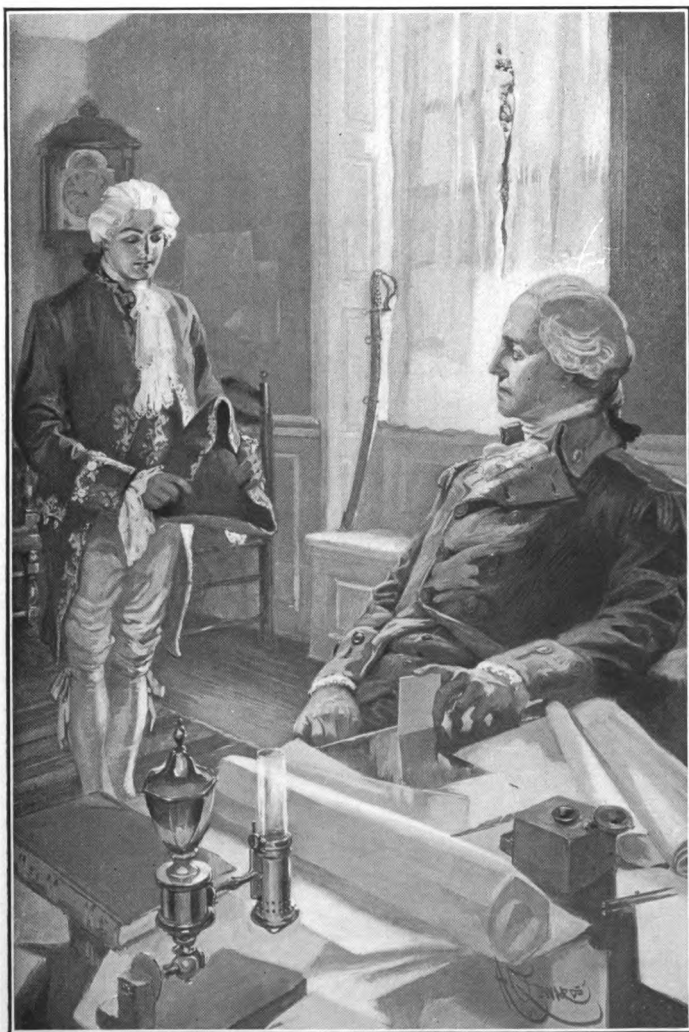
"There can be no excuse in my case, sir. But I have not reported the loss of my despatches."

"'Twas needless. But if you have no excuse, perhaps you will at least favor me by a recital of your doings since you left."

Whereupon I found my tongue and launched upon what must have proved a vivid account of the adventures that had befallen me since I had ridden away from New York. As I proceeded he arose and, walking to the window, stood looking out, his back turned to me. I paused at this.

"Go on. I am listening," he commanded.

When I told of the girl's scream of fear and how I had sprung to her defence, forgetting all in my eagerness to slay the knave who had intruded upon her, and how I had fled with her to protect her from the rabble, one of his hands went to his chin and remained there, a favorite attitude of his when profoundly interested. I



**"YOU HAVE THE EFFRONTERY TO REPORT THE LOSS OF YOUR  
DESPATCHES AND HAVE NO EXCUSE?"—Page 276.**





brought the recital through the affair at the Red Fox inn without telling of the Unknown's duel in the hallway and without saying aught of a blood-stained kerchief.

"And now, sir, I report for punishment," I said as bravely as possible in conclusion.

He stood motionless for a moment, and then turned towards me.

"And what favor do you ask?"

"None, sir, lest it be permission to lead the most desperate hope in the struggle that is coming to us — permission to die honorably."

My old zeal was returning, and there was much of fervor in my plea.

"God grant your death may be honorable when it comes, for your life has been so."

"But my failure, sir!"

He laid his hand on my shoulder. "My boy," he said, and his tone was kindly, "a soldier's blade should be for his country first and virtue next, because 'the greatest good to the greatest number' is a rule as old as civilization, but young blood cannot always be expected to be deaf to a female's cry until country has been considered. I think that at your age I should have had the same report to submit that you have brought me."

He must have seen the tears that sprang to my eyes, for he ceased speaking for a moment and took a few turns across the room.

"You will resume command of your company at once, Captain," he said, stopping before me again.

I began pouring out my thanks, but he stopped me with a gesture.

"It is only fair," he said, "to tell you that one reason for my leniency is because your failure did no harm — rather did it work some good. A change in plans made it desirable that a message should be sent to Congress asking that your information be disregarded and the last despatch acted upon. Thirty-six hours after you left, another messenger was on his way to Philadelphia. He delivered his despatch and learned that you had not. Two days ago a Tory spy was caught with the despatch stolen from you on his person. I knew then that for some reason you had failed. Such information as the enemy gained from that message served only to mislead them."

. . . . .

I have no wish to tell to you that which is writ in the histories of your country. This tale has to do with those things that are writ only in

hearts, and so I ignore those terrible days when Long Island and the adjacent country was stained with blood. In those weeks Boyd won praise for his gallantry, and when Washington's beaten army was sent flying across New Jersey, he marched with it as a lieutenant, though so great was the number of desertions that he was commander of but a handful.

Despair marched by the side of each Patriot soldier in that retreat before Cornwallis, and officers, wearied and numbed with the increasing cold, blasphemed God in their bitterness. But still we struggled on towards the Delaware, oftentimes our rear guard hearing the music of the bands of the British advance.

"Remember that I once asked you if you thought we would ever come back?" said Boyd, as we plodded along. "Well, we're coming."

A ghost of a smile played about his lips for a moment, and then was gone, leaving there the tense lines that suffering had drawn.

"Yes, but it looks as though if we ever see Philadelphia again it will be as prisoners of Cornwallis," I replied.

"If only that cursed Lee would quit plotting and go to fighting!" he exclaimed.

"If only King George would sing 'Yankee Doodle!' " was my reply, meant to be caustic.

Winter in all of its severity found us still retreating. Before us and on either side of us were folk whose patriotism cooled more rapidly at the approach of Cornwallis than did their shins at the nip of winter, and behind us were the Hessians and British, jesting at the pitiful trail of red left on the snow by the hundreds who were without shoes. And the scouts who hung on the flanks of the enemy each day brought tales of brutish excesses by the Hessians.

But at last the Delaware lay before us, and the ever-slothful enemy rested at Princeton long enough for us to cross in safety. Then we hovered on the west bank of the Delaware while the enemy gave up the pursuit at the river bank and went into winter quarters, full confident that such Continentals as did not freeze to death would desert before spring.

Boyd, being familiar with the country, was given much scouting duty, and brought back the first information of the Congress deserting Philadelphia for Baltimore. On these journeys to the Capital he managed to pay his respects quite often to Mary Wilmoth, who, with her mother, he found living in a modest cottage, and it was

on his return from one of these expeditions that he entered the miserable little hut where I was quartered and proudly exhibited a heavy scarf she had knit for him.

"Is it not splendid?" he asked, wrapping it about his throat and ears in order to best exhibit it.

"Aye, and most becoming," I responded, "for it hides all of your countenance but your eyebrows."

"My lover is a soldier lad,"

sang Boyd, blithely, and added: "'Tis not beauty but bullets that count, friend Lester, so it matters not what the scarf may hide so long as it keeps the cold from stealing the life from a body that may stop British lead."

"Nay, rather let us hope 'twill keep frost from the lips that hunger to buss a Patriot maid," I replied, smiling.

He laughed and unwound the scarf from about his neck.

"In truth, I like your idea the better," he said, "and in payment for the suggestion will I give you a bit of news that may interest you. The Langfords have left Philadelphia."

He looked me full in the face as he spoke, and I knew that he had not forgotten a red rose, and how I had hung out of the window of the Golden Lion when the young Loyalist had smiled at me from her coach. But no sign of unusual interest reached my face.

"Indeed?" I put the answer carelessly, I flatter myself.

"Yes, the house is closed. But I have greater news."

"Then out with it at once, Sir Gossiper," I cried, jocularly.

"Gayle Langford is soon to wed the Prince."

I had taken up the candle in order to more closely examine the gift scarf, and somehow the bit of tallow slipped from my hand and fell to the floor. Quickly reaching forward, I snatched it up, the moment's respite enabling me to recover myself.

"This freezing and starving has made my clutch uncertain," I said, replacing the candle.

"Beginning to have 'nerves,' Lester?"

"It seems they're growing shaky," I replied.

"But the wedding — care you nothing for the yarn?"

"Ah, yes, — the wedding. 'Twas like to have been forgotten in our discussion of starvation

and 'nerves.' Of course, tell me of the wedding."

"Well, after all, 'tis a brief tale. I only know that 'tis said the ceremony will be spoken during the holidays, and that the Langfords are now with the Prince in his winter quarters."

"Winter quarters? Then he has finally joined the army?"

"It seems so, and commands some Hessian battalion — though where I know not."

"Mayhap over yonder," I replied, waving my hand towards the Delaware.

"'Tis said in the town that after the death of Peter Langford, Mistress Gayle and the Prince were constantly in each other's company, and that the girl was greatly devoted to the rascal."

"Very likely. 'Tis a way girls have — bestowing their affections on rascals."

I looked at him so significantly, and smiled, that he blushed a fiery red, and, shifting from one foot to another, said he believed he had better be about his duties.

"But not until you take my hand, old friend, and say you harbor no resentment because of my jests," I said, rising and standing before him.

He seized my hand and squeezed it. "Bless



you, there is no room in my heart for surliness." And with a merry laugh, he was gone.

Then, with none to see, the mask fell from my face and the truth that had never been really confessed to myself crushed down upon my heart until, in the pain of it, I rose and paced the narrow hut. Yes, 'twas true, I loved Gayle Langford! God in heaven, 'twas drearily, pitifully true! And now this hour had come, as I had known it must come, and, knowing it, I had not before yielded my brain to my heart — and never had I been able to force my heart to yield to my brain. What man with red blood in his veins can?

"You should never have loved her!" piped a small voice to me, and I clenched my hands and would have struck had the voice come from mortal. Never had there been an instant when I failed to realize how far apart we were, as far apart as though we had our being on different planets — hers a brilliant star high above the sunless world where I groped along a danger-strewn pathway lighted only by war's lurid lightnings. Dear God, every moment I had been filled with the knowledge of its hopelessness! But why should I have been led to her side, to look into her eyes, to hear the music of her voice,

to see the nobility of her soul shine through the mists? I had not sought her. If it were true that God ruled, had He not taken me by the hand and led me to her? And now —

I know not how long I sat there, brooding, but the cold crept to my marrow and I saw that my candle was spluttering its life out. In the east the dawn was flinging its orange and gold banners into the sky and a crescent moon hung lustreless over a whitened hill where ever and anon the snow sprang up in glee dances to the piping of the north wind.

## CHAPTER XV

### IN WHICH I TURN CLERGYMAN

**A**S the days dragged by, a whisper filtered through the American camp that lifted the freezing and starving soldiers out of the pit of despair, for it said that Washington was planning to cross the Delaware and strike the enemy at Trenton.

Night after night our scouts crossed the river and reconnoitred in and about Trenton, and as day succeeded day their reports were that Rahl was growing more and more careless and that carousals and debauchery were rapidly succeeding any semblance of discipline and caution. A Patriot farmer on the Jersey shore kept a stable filled with horses for the use of the American scouts, who would cross the river after dark, make their way to this stable and provide themselves with a mount, returning the horse and hiding the saddle before coming back to camp.

Late in the afternoon of Christmas Day I pushed off from the Pennsylvania shore bent on noting the extent of the Hessian Christmas carousals and reporting to the Chief, when our army should land in Jersey that night. I went alone, and scarce had I left the protection of the shore until I found that 'twas a most hazardous task that lay before me. The high wind and the swift current sent the ice cakes crashing and grinding against each other, and in fighting the ice away from my boat I had but little time to row, but managed to keep my course fairly well until close to the farther shore, when a giant floe struck the frail craft with terrific force and stove in the side. Instantly the water rushed in, and, seeing my only hope, I slammed the oars into position and tugged desperately at them. Lower and lower the boat settled, until, within a few feet of safety, it sank from under me and I found myself swimming in the icy river. God's mercy! Had I been less the hardened soldier I would have died of the chill, but I struggled with the strength of despair and soon found my feet touching bottom.

I waded ashore and without delay set off at a brisk run for the home of the farmer, and though my clothing froze on me as I ran, the exercise kept

my blood circulating and I was able to stagger into the kitchen of the farmhouse, where hot rum was poured down my throat and my clothing was spread to dry before a roaring fire. Then at dusk I fared forth, mounted on a horse from the "scout's stable," as it was known in our lines. With the saddle were holsters and pistols.

I was in no hurry to reach the town, and rode slowly, thankful that the wind was at my back. Presently I became aware of the pounding of hoofs on the frozen road behind me, and, turning in my saddle, I saw a man coming at a full gallop. Drawing the folds of my heavy cape the closer about me to hide my uniform, though there was small chance of the faded rags being recognized as a uniform, I slipped a pistol from its holster and concealed it under my cape as the stranger rode to my side and reined down to the jog pace of my mount.

"Friend, you ride as though the weather were to your liking," he said in a heavy voice.

"My beast is weary," I replied, studying him as best I could in the gloom.

"'A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast.' — Proverbs xii: 10."

His cloak was wrapped closely about him, but I could see that his garb was sombre throughout.

"Ah, a minister of the gospel, I take it," I said at a hazard.

"Even so. 'Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed; but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded.' — Proverbs xiii:13."

"Ride you to Trenton?"

"Yes, even to that town which I am told is given to much wickedness since the coming of the soldiers."

"In truth, I think they stand much in need of a clergyman," I said.

"Gladly would I speak unto them the message of our God, yet they do but scoff at its preaching, I am told. 'Tis not to preach that I ride to Trenton."

"Not to preach?"

"Nay, but to speak the solemn words of a marriage ceremony."

The exclamation that broke from my lips was stolen by the sweep of the rising wind and escaped my companion.

"This night," he continued, "a noble from across the seas espouses a Philadelphia maid. She will have none of the army chaplains, and I was sent for. I had best hasten my beast lest I be late."

"At what hour will the vows be taken, and

where?" I bent my head low over my saddle to hide the anxiety my question might indicate.

"When the hour of eight is half-spent — at Colonel Rahl's headquarters."

He spoke to his horse and the animal broke into a sharp canter. I did likewise and rode at his side, my brain a whirling chaos.

"This ungodly strife is near to an end," said the preacher, "and 'tis well that the hearts of men and maids turn to tenderer subjects. 'Tis fitting that — Ug-g-h! Great Jehovah!"

The sentence he was voicing so glibly gave way to the closing exclamations as he saw a hand from out of the gloom suddenly clutch his bridle-rein while another hand shoved the dark muzzle of a pistol close to his face.

"Fear not, for no harm shall come to you if you obey me quickly," I said.

"'Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake thy law!' So 'tis writ in the Psalms. But what is your evil will, man of violence?"

"First that you hold your hands above your head while I search for your weapons. So. Ah, you are unarmed, I see."

"'In God is my salvation and my glory; and my refuge is in God.' So saith the Psalmist."

" 'Tis a glorious faith, I grant, but for hearty persuasion a toy like this is greatly to be admired." I patted my pistol as I spoke. " And now, my good man, I will trouble you to dismount. Thanks. Now please to tie both horses to this tree. Very nicely done, I vow. Kindly walk ahead of me to yon house, which I'll wager has been deserted by those who feared Briton or American."

He remained silent but marched ahead to the cabin close beside the road, which, as I surmised, had been deserted. The door yielded easily. I had taken from my pouch a piece of candle, a bit of tinder obtained from the Patriot farmer, and my flint and steel, and these I held out to my captive as we reached the door, at the same time keeping my pistol covering him.

" Strike a light, please," I commanded, and he knelt on the floor and began striking the sparks from the flint.

After a few efforts the tinder caught the spark, and a moment later the preacher stood before me with lighted candle. I stepped within and put my back to the closed door. Nothing in the way of furniture had been left in the cabin, and I knew that I need fear no interruption in the programme on which I had decided.



"A rebel soldier!" he cried, as my cloak fell away and revealed my uniform. "'All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword!'"

"'Tis some comfort, then, to know that I shall not be hanged, as my uncle fears. But I must insist on trading clothes with you."

He expostulated and quoted much Scripture to convince me I was plunging into the awful pit, but a demonstration with that evil-looking pistol caused him to hastily disrobe, and then he stood with chattering teeth while I discarded my uniform.

"Zounds, man, you would be the beau of the army would you but 'list!" I chaffed, after we had again dressed. "Now I must borrow that handsome wig you wear. Sorry I have none to exchange for it. Here, I will return your valuables, all but this prayer-book, and this bit of paper with Colonel Rahl's signature passing the Reverend Jonathan Collenbaugh through his lines. Possibly I may ride to Trenton. If so, I will present your regrets and explain that you are unable to officiate at the wedding to-night. I will fasten the hasp on the door as I go out, but a strong man like you can soon break it down. I shall be compelled to turn your horse loose, but

by a few hours of steady walking you should be able to reach shelter. And you will not freeze if you walk."

I backed out, pulled the door shut, and dropped the peg in the hasp. Then I ran to the horses, jerked the bridle off the minister's mount, and sent the animal scurrying away; after which I sprang into my own saddle and galloped away towards Trenton.

I knew that the Reverend Collenbaugh could not reach the town for at least two hours after I did, and then he was apt to have a night in the guard-house before he could explain how he chanced to be wearing a rebel uniform. That I was taking one of the most desperate chances of my unpeaceful career I well knew, but I had resolved that there should be no wedding at Rahl's that night. After that — Perhaps I might fall in the attack for which Washington's army was at that moment on the march, and then wedding or war would mean naught to me, but 'neath winter's snows and summer's roses I should sleep unmindful of it all.

Snow was beginning to fall, and by the time the lights of Trenton were in view the snow was whirling about me in great clouds. Suddenly a figure loomed up before me in the roadway.

"Halt!" came the sharp challenge, and I promptly obeyed.

"A man of peace on a tender mission," I replied in response to the picket's questions. Then I handed over my stolen pass. He called, and from a shed appeared another soldier with a lantern.

"Humph! A parson!" There was a sneer in his tone as he handed the paper back to me.

"Yea, even so. 'Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed; but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded,'" quoth I, striving to imitate Collenbaugh's tone and manner.

Then I rode on, receiving an occasional challenge, until I was near to Rahl's headquarters, which I could readily distinguish by the abundance of light and the music of the fiddles and hautboys, for the Hessian colonel was notoriously fond of music and pomp. When near this place I dismounted and led my horse to the shelter of a small shed in the rear of a house that appeared tenantless. I examined the pistols in the holsters, and, making sure that they were ready for service, I replaced them and carefully protected them from the weather. I would have felt much better with them at my hips, but they were far too heavy

and cumbersome to carry without holsters, so I tucked my prayer-book under my arm and went boldly forth.

Drunken Hessians were everywhere, and I smiled grimly as I thought of the avenging army that soon would fall upon the hirelings who had left a trail of debauchery across the country. Before Rahl's headquarters stood cannons that should have been in defences. At the entrance a sentry halted me, and smiled as he read my pass.

"It's all reg'lar, Parson, an' I know jolly well there's to be a marryin' to-night, but I must call the Captain of the Guard. It's orders from Colonel Rahl."

A few moments later and a swagger young English officer appeared, garbed in all of the brilliance of the British dress uniform. He looked at my pass and smiled, also.

"Come right in, sir, and warm your bones. It must have been a beastly ride you have had, sir. But Mistress Langford needs must have a minister of her own church — and no army chaplain would she have near her." He rattled on as he led me into the house, not giving me opportunity for reply. "The Prince is a lucky blade — though he doesn't deserve such a bride. There! I've let

my tongue wag too much. But when you see her you'll say, yourself, that she's superb, for even a preacher knows a comely wench when he sees her, eh, Parson? "

" ' As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion,' " I replied, chancing to remember a quotation which had been a favorite of my great-uncle's.

He laughed merrily and ushered me into a waiting-room.

" What is your pleasure? " he asked.

" I would have speech with the maiden

" Certainly, I'll — there, I am being called. I'll return as soon as possible and present you."

With a gay song on his lips he hurried away and I stood alone, listening to the sound of the music, while from a near-by room came bursts of laughter and an occasional verse of a drinking song. Rumor had told us of the Continental army that there was much guzzling of liquor at the Hessian headquarters, and even on this occasion they were drinking to excess.

It lacked about an hour of the time for the ceremony. A log blazed on the cavernous fireplace and half a dozen candles in highly polished brass holders illuminated the room. I stepped to the window and peered out into the winter's

storm. Would that blinding whirl of snow drift across my grave a few hours hence? Nervous? Aye, 'tis as well I should confess it, for here was I surrounded by those who would snuff out my life at a moment's notice should aught betray me, while somewhere within the house was the maid I loved, a maid who was even then decking herself for espousal with another — and a few miles away my comrades were coming to give battle. Think you I had no cause for nervousness?

"Is you waitin' fer some one, suh?" asked a voice behind me, and, turning, I stood face to face with old Erasmus, gorgeous in the Langford livery.

"Even so. I am the minister come to join the man and the maid in wedlock. I would speak with the maid." I was wondering how my disguise would stand this test.

"Yes, suh, I 'spect she be monstrous glad ter see ye, suh, fer she has been a-walkin' de floor an' er talkin' to herself like she done feared ye wouldn't —"

His eyes, which he had turned on me carelessly, seemed suddenly to dilate, and he took a quick step towards me, staring full into my face.

"What ails you, fellow, that you stare thus at me?" I exclaimed sternly.

" 'Scuse me, suh, 'scuse me — I — thought — what? — how come it? " He paused a moment and then threw out his arms towards me, and cried in a tense whisper: " Marse Ian! Oh, de good Lord, Marse Ian! "

" Sh-h-h! Not that name, Rassel! Pull yourself together quickly. It's life or death to me. "

" Yes, suh, I'se gwine ter keep dat name jes' in my heart, an' neber speak it hyar agin, fer, Oh-h-h! de sweet ol' Missus lookin' down ergin an' pleadin' wif ol' Rassel ter keer fer her boy! "

" Then as you love her memory, give not a sign, no matter what happens. How came you here? "

" Wif de Langfords, suh. Dat title an' dat money dey've kept on er leakin', an' ter-night dey gwine ter git tergedder. "

" No, no! Not this night, Rassel! But take me to Gayle Langford at once. "

" Yes, suh, Marse Ia — Marse Preacher, jes' foller me. "

He turned towards the door, but as he did so the Captain of the Guard stepped into the room.

" Ah, the servant was about to direct you, eh, Parson? But I welcome the honor. " He smiled pleasantly. " You may go, " he added, turning to the negro.

Erasmus hesitated, glanced at me, and then, bowing low, he walked slowly away, and I saw his lips move and knew he was in prayer.

"May I offer my arm, Parson? But pardon my thoughtlessness in not introducing myself. Parson, your most humble servant, Francis Dunlap Colburn, Captain in his Majesty's Grenadiers." He bowed low before me, and I found myself liking the blithe fellow.

"And may no bullet e'er be molded that will close your honest eyes in death," I responded with right hearty fervor.

"A right civil speech, sir, and my thanks for it. Shall we now seek the expectant maid?"

I took his arm and we walked out into the hallway, a strangely contrasted pair, the brilliant colors and gold cordings of his uniform having an added splendor when compared with the sombre clergyman's garb I was wearing.

"This noble," I asked, "is he not deserving of his bride?"

"Mayhap it ill becomes one of us roistering blades to speak ill of any man, but I have no stomach for a fortune-hunter, be he King's Loyalist or rebel!"

We had paused at the foot of the stairs.



"But the maid loves the scamp, doubtless," I said, as we commenced the ascent.

He laughed. "Who can read the heart of such as she? I have no skill in the tender subtleties of the wenches, Parson. But the mother! Oh, the m-o-t-h-e-r!" He drawled the word, then paused again and cocked his head to one side, and drew down the corners of his mouth in a comical way. "Saint George, but 'tis enough to turn vinegar to sugar to hear her loll that title, 'Pr-r-ince,' on her tongue, turning it over and over like a sweet-meat, and tasting it on all sides. Why, 'tis the jest of the mess-room — behind the Prince's back, mind you, for he plays a clever blade when he has the courage to use it."

I think my hand gripped his arm a little tighter as my mind drew for me a picture of the sacrifice this girl was making in the name of duty. I made no reply, for, in truth, had I parted my lips a flood of most unministerial words would have rolled out. We went up the stairs in silence and found ourselves on a broad landing, from which wide hallways led, and spacious doorways revealed rooms brilliant with candle-light, as was the landing. From some room below came the subdued notes of the fiddles and hautboys in rhythmic melody.

"Look!" whispered Colburn, waving his hand towards the open door of a room in front of us.

Sweet heaven, his word was tardy, for my eyes had already fixed on the picture before me. In a mahogany chair sat a girl, gowned in creamy silk cut low, and revealing a shoulder whose whiteness shamed the snow on the hills; her hair was adorned with a cluster of flowers tucked in among the billowy masses where the candle-light revealed coppery glints. On a table before her rested her outstretched arms; her head was drooped slightly, every lineament denoting meditation. Her profile was revealed to me, and in her cheek I saw no glow.

"Gayle Langford!" I exclaimed, softly.

He glanced quickly at me. "How know you that?"

I felt the blood mount to my face. "I — the bride — I could not fail to surmise," I replied, in confusion.

"Saint George, no! God fashioned but one — and for a Hessian —" He broke off abruptly. "Come, let me present you."

## CHAPTER XVI

### A MATCHLESS MAID

**N**OW, indeed, was I come to one of the crucial moments of my reckless life, and my heart beat fast during those few steps that carried us into the room where she had sat alone. And then we stood before her as she dropped her arms from the table and raised her eyes to our faces.

“Mistress Langford, ’tis a most gracious honor that is mine, the ill-deserved privilege of presenting to you the clergyman whom you await. Permit me — the Reverend Jonathan Collenbaugh.”

“And may it prove that joy comes with me,” I said in the heavy tone I had assumed, and with a most unusual sweep to my bow in order to the better avert my face.

I saw her bend in a curtsy of delicious grace, and then I raised my head and looked into her eyes.

"I fear it has been a most distressing journey to which the whim of an o'erfoolish maid summoned you," she was saying. "But I did not — know — the weather —"

Amazement had leaped to her eyes, and a wave of red rushed to her cheeks as her gaze fixed on my face. Then the color faded and the deathly whiteness of marble was in her face. There was a sudden gasp deep in her throat and her body swayed.

"Saint George! What ails you, child?" cried Colburn, springing forward and catching her arm. "A sudden illness? Let me summon the ladies."

"No, no, Captain!" The words were husky, but her body no longer swayed. "It is — it is — why — cannot a bride — affect a swoon without — the house being aroused?" The wraith of a smile came to her lips and she turned her gaze from me to the grenadier.

"Affect? There's not another maid in all the Colonies would have come out of that without a pillbag fussing over her."

"You English have an ever ready stock of compliments, Captain. I am beholden to you."

"And you double my amazement and admiration by your clever play of words, which any man

with the brains of a lout can see are but skirmishes to enable you to rally your forces. Mistress, your fettered slave." And the gallant fellow swept her a courteous bow. "Were it a century earlier I would duel the Prince for your smile."

"Command of self is most commendable in maid or man," spake I.

Her eyes came back to mine and for a few breaths I stood looking into their depths, trying to read my fate. A word from her and I was doomed. I saw the amazement and bewilderment slowly fade, and in their stead came a cold hauteur with the old, proud poise of the head. Then she spoke.

"'Tis very true, — ah, — reverend sir, that both maids and men sometimes are guilty of most detestable actions." There was no mistaking the import of her words.

"Oh, my dear lady," cried Colburn, "you quite mistake the Parson's meaning, I am sure. He —"

"Pray do not be too heedful of our little exchange, Captain Colburn," she interrupted. "I attach no special significance to Reverend Collenbaugh's remark — and I am very certain that he did not in the slightest misunderstand my meaning — er — did you, *Reverend* Collenbaugh?"

She turned her eyes to me again and the mockery I saw playing there sent the blood to my cheeks.

"Not in the slightest degree," I replied, with a feeling that I was being humiliated.

There was a knock at the doorway and Erasmus entered.

"'Scuse me, but a sojer down-stairs done ask me ter say dat de Cap'n of de Guard was wanted below."

"Tell them I'll be down at once," said Colburn.

I saw the girl watching the darky closely and divined that she was seeking to detect any sign of recognition of me. But the old fellow paid not the slightest heed to me, and I thought I saw a faint look of relief come into her eyes, where her emotions always were plainly writ.

"Duty! Duty! 'Tis a stern master we of the army serve," exclaimed Colburn, but his tone was gay as ever. "'Tis

'A word and a bow to beauty,  
Then away at the beck of Duty.'"

"And duty is not always pleasant," I said.

"Saint George, no! Here we have been chasing Washington's men across country and shooting

a few of the rebels now and then because it was our duty, but I'll vow 'twould have been more to my liking to give the poor beggars warm coats and a stomach full of food."

"May God bless your noble heart!" I exclaimed.

"And to-night the ragamuffins are freezing and starving just across the Delaware." He struck the hilt of his sword sharply. "Poor beggars! Poor, wretched beggars!" he said, softly.

"Aye, they freeze beyond the Delaware while the King's men revel in — this!" I stretched out my arms with a gesture that encompassed the comforts and brilliance of the building.

Gayle Langford said nothing, but, slowly turning away, she sank into a chair. I tried to catch her eyes, but her face was averted, arms resting on the table.

"And yet, did they but know it, 'twould be easy for the rebels to seize this town. If —"

"Captain Colburn!" cried the girl, facing towards him suddenly, and flinging up one hand with an imperious gesture. "Have a care how you discuss a possible weakness in the presence of a stranger — even though he be a clergyman." She shot me a swift glance.

Colburn laughed easily. "I accept the reprimand."

mand, Mistress Langford, but, in truth, we could put every picket in bed with perfect safety this night, for no army on earth could cross the Delaware in its present condition."

"But this Washington — does he not delight in doing that which the King's officers declare cannot be done?"

A shadow rested on his face a moment. "There is much of truth in your words, yet he is but human. But I must descend at once or that poor old servant of yours will be climbing the stairs once more after me. I'll warrant those yagers have been cursing monstrously because I have not come."

He bowed and turned away, but at the door he paused, and looked back.

"By the way, Mistress Langford, I will seek the Prince and inform him that the clergyman has arrived. 'Twill be a most charming message —"

"No, no, no!" she cried, springing to her feet. "You must not, Captain, you must not!" He looked at her in surprise, and she caught herself. "'Tis but a bit of sentiment, Captain, but let *me* tell my fiancé that bit of news. Come, Captain, your promise of silence."

Her laugh rang blithe, but the marble was in her cheeks.



"My sacred promise," was the grenadier's smiling reply, and then he passed down the stairs.

We were alone. There was a moment in which no word was spoken, a moment when the rhythmic notes of the hautboys and fiddles seemed throbbing themselves into my brain. Then she turned to me, and her tone was tense as she asked:

"*Captain Lester*, why are you here?"

Her eyes were burning into mine; the mask she had worn had fallen away, and instead of the laugh that had burst from her lips there was something akin to a sob in her voice. For a few heart-beats the danger was forgotten and I felt only the thrill of her presence, of being near her; and if I had confessed to myself on the other side of the Delaware that I loved her, with what a mighty sweep was it flooding my heart now with her before me in all her warm, pulsating beauty, and with the events of this evening revealing new beauties of her character! Small wonder was it if I stood dumb.

"*Why*, please?" she repeated.

"I came for your sake!" I said, and the fervor of my words sent a bit of color to her face.

"A riddle, sir. For my sake?"

"Aye, for your sake. I have taken my life in

my hand that I might save you from this monstrous sacrifice!"

There was a faint gasp, a quick intaking of her breath. Then her eyes showed naught but the coldness of winter.

"Enough of this masquerade," she said. "Doubtless you have gained all of the information you sought. You have now an opportunity for escape. Take it and go at once. I have not forgotten that I owe you much, else I could not permit the escape of a spy!"

The red burned in my cheeks at this. "You mistake. I am not here as a spy, though I left camp on a scout."

"A 'scout' in the enemy's lines in disguise?" There was a world of scorn in her tones.

"I met Collenbaugh on the road — a pistol-muzzle under his nose and he traded me this garb for my uniform. God, it was the only way! He was coming here to bind you in marriage to —"

"To one I promised to wed."

"Doubtless, but whom you do not love. You cannot love him. You would never wed such as he save —"

"Silence, sir! Have done with these insults. There may yet be time for you to escape."

"And though he donned a stolen uniform and

left you to the protection of a stranger that July night, you still would wed him? ”

It seemed to me a slight shiver passed over her.

“ The Prince is not ever ready to brawl, ’tis true, like — some — but — ”

“ I have not brawled except to resent insults to — to — ”

I hesitated, seeing whither my sudden exasperation had led me.

“ To some tavern maid. Doubtless the seeking of her smiles by another was ample cause for it all.”

She sank down into the chair again, and I stood looking at her dumbly.

“ I confess, Captain, that quite unintentionally I overheard Major Wilmoth’s words that day in the farmhouse when he ministered to your broken head. I chanced — Ah, please come in, mother. The bride-elect is quite deserted.”

She had risen suddenly to her feet and was holding out her hands to some one behind her. I heard the swish of skirts, and, turning, saw Mrs. Langford entering the room.

“ Let me present — Reverend Collenbaugh, mother.”

The elder lady surveyed me critically through her lorgnette, after a stately acknowledgment,

and I wondered if she would recognize the reckless courier who had thrown the banquet into a turmoil.

"There is something about your features that seems familiar, sir," she said.

"A fact not altogether singular," I replied. "Utter strangers have often impressed me thus."

"It seems that I have certainly seen you somewhere," she persisted.

"No doubt in our drives about Philadelphia," said the girl. "You have often been there, have you not, Mr. Collenbaugh?"

"I have been there," I replied.

"Where is the Prince?" asked Mrs. Langford, turning to the girl.

"Doubtless, below stairs with Colonel Rahl. I have not seen him since candle-light."

"The dear fellow is *such* a favorite with the officers," said the old dame to me, cooingly. "They insist on his being with them every possible moment, for now that nothing remains of this sinful revolution but a few ragged adventurers beyond the Delaware, the Prince expects to return to his estates soon after the wedding."

"And of course you will accompany them?" There was a question in my tone.

"Yes — yes, I suppose so. The dear Prince

insisted that the wedding be celebrated here at once, so he could arrange to return. Of course, it is just a little soon after — after Mr. Langford's death — but the Prince is so devoted to my daughter — and it will be a very simple affair — and Gayle loves the Prince so well!"

"'Tis proper enough," I said, but my eyes were on the girl, whose face was averted.

"O dear me, I am sure it is or I should never have consented to the dear Prince's importunities," replied the mother, grandly, and I found myself smiling at the remembrance of what the Captain of the Guard had said about her lolling the title on her tongue.

The girl walked slowly to the window and stood leaning on the casement, looking out at the blinding whirl of snow. She kept her face well from me, but there was naught of joy and blissful anticipation in her attitude. Rather was it the air of one who had nerved herself to the meeting of a certain crisis, and who would not harbor a thought to the contrary. The mother glanced towards her, and then, leaning towards me, said in a low tone:

"And you know that a mother must always protect her daughter against youthful follies. Sometimes romance blinds a maid to — ah — her

real love and — ah — interests. Gayle loves the Prince very dearly, but a dashing young rebel officer did her a — ah — great service some months ago, and she was really a bit distant to the dear Prince for a few weeks. But she came to see that I was right in my counsels,— my mother's love, you know, — and soon she had quite forgotten the rebel and was willing to grant the dear Prince's plea for an early marriage. Do you not think I was right in my — ah — counsels, Reverend Collenbaugh? ”

“ A mother who pleads for her daughter's best interests is always to be commended,” I replied, bowing.

“ Oh, I knew you would say I did right,” she exclaimed eagerly, though, in truth, I had said nothing of the kind, as you will agree.

“ I must see to other duties now. 'Tis less than an hour until the ceremony, a very trying ordeal for a maid. My daughter may become — ah — nervous, you know, and — ah — I am sure you will advise her rightly should she — ah — say aught to you.”

“ Of that you may be assured,” I replied, but the sarcasm of my speech was not caught.

She cooed her thanks and then swept from the room, after a hesitating look towards the girl at

the window. I sank into the chair by the table and put one hand to my throbbing temples. I had been right. 'Twas a sacrifice, a cruel sacrifice, Gayle Langford was making of herself on the altar of her mother's ambition — and the mother herself, now that the ceremony was about to be consummated, was feeling a faint twinge of conscience, hence her appeal to the pretended clergyman for endorsement. And in her heart was a fear that the girl might falter at the last moment and cry out to the minister. But another thought jerked me out of the chair, and set me to pacing the room. Gayle Langford sped across the room and confronted me.

"Captain Lester," she said, "how long do you expect to remain here? Surely, you do not plan to perform a ceremony that will be a mockery!"

"No, there will be no wedding to-night!"

"You presume too far, sir. Am I to permit you to stop my wedding simply because you once saved me from a pack of your rebel wolves? I have offered you an opportunity to escape. I offer it again. Go at once before Rahl and his officers ascend the stairs. I shall summon an army chaplain and have the marriage proceed in spite of your interference."

"You would marry that poltroon in spite of all?" I asked, thoroughly exasperated.

"'Tis wondrous brave to insult a man in his absence!" There was a scorn in her voice that stung me.

"Summon him, then, and if it be that he has the courage to resent an insult I will save you from this marriage."

"What mean you?" The words were but little more than a gasp.

"That I am the better swordsman, and a thrust will avenge me and save you."

She darted to the doorway, and then faced me again.

"This one last chance I offer you!" she cried. "Go now or I call the guard!"

I folded my arms. "I am waiting your call," I replied.

There was a moment's hesitation, and in that moment a prodigious babble of voices came to us from below, there were a few sharp words of command, and the hubbub ceased. Then we heard a heavy step on the stairs. With a startled look on her face the girl retreated from the doorway, but I breathed more freely when I saw the Captain of the Guard approaching. He turned his eyes on me with a searching look.



"A most extraordinary incident, Parson," he said. "The guards have brought in a fellow in a ragged rebel uniform, and, by the flesh of the devil, he was crazy enough to swear he was Reverend Collenbaugh, that he had been robbed of his clothes, and had by rare good luck found a countryman coming this way, with whom he rode to the town. 'Twas a rambling tale of pistols, vacant cabins, and bandits."

"I trust that you dealt gently with the poor fellow," I replied piously. "He must, indeed, be sadly deranged."

"Yes, to be sure. You know there can be but one Reverend Collenbaugh. I confess I have not known the clergy as intimately as my soul's welfare demands, but I picked you to be the real parson." He laughed merrily. "What think you, Mistress Langford?" he asked.

"I am able to answer positively to this gentleman's identity, for I find that we have known each other before to-night."

She smiled sweetly and the officer seized a conclusion.

"Then all doubt is removed. Parson, you are fortunate, for I confess that had she not known you some embarrassment might have resulted."

"We certainly have known each other before

to-night, Captain," I responded. "May I suggest a comfortable nook in the guard-house for the other man? No doubt he is demented, and, having heard of my mission, he — ah, I have it! Is he a man much of my build, with an inclination to baldness that should be covered by a wig, and with one finger of his left hand gone at the knuckle?" I described the real Collenbaugh.

"Those very things I noticed," replied Colburn.

"I thought as much. I remember pausing at a farmhouse to warm myself, and the poor fellow who was my host was most inquisitive as to my journey. It came to me then that his mind was not right. Guard him and care for him properly, I pray you, for he has done no wrong."

"Have no fear. You ministers are too tender-hearted for these days of war. I cannot tarry longer, as 'tis time for the changing of the guard."

Gayle Langford and I stood looking into each other's eyes after he had left us. I was the first to speak.

"It was good of you," I said.

"Oh, I beg of you to go. 'Tis not possible your masquerade can long be successful. Why will you not heed my words? Why will you not?"

No longer was she the haughty, imperious one,

but a pleading, beseeching maid near to tears, and with a suspicion of a sob in her throat.

"Mayhap you are right, that I should go. But 'tis not the danger that prompts the words. It and I have been companions during many bitter months. 'Fore God, Mistress — Gayle — I came but in the hope of in some way saving you from this marriage, and even now I would remain and give my life if need be to prevent a sacrifice, but you have declared that you will wed the Prince in spite of my efforts, and so I will bid you farewell."

Her hands were clasped, and her head had dropped as I spoke, but now she raised her eyes and I saw tears trembling on the long lashes. The wail of the fiddles and hautboys had begun again in a sadly sweet strain.

"Farewell? 'Tis a sad word, Captain, but — yes, I know 'tis well chosen. It must, indeed, be — farewell. I am grateful — you do not know how grateful — but I want you to remember me as happy in my marriage."

"Happy? 'Tis the one word that bids me go. Should I tarry longer 'twould be but selfishness prompting."

"*Selfishness?*"

"Aye, girl. Need the words be spoken to tell

you that I love you, that I came hoping to bear you away from here — where, I hardly knew? I knew only that I felt you were needing a strong arm, and so I came, trusting that I might serve you. I was wrong in it all — and so 'tis farewell."

"*You love me?*" she asked, and there was a light, a baffling light, behind the tears in her eyes.

"Love you? I —" Something choked in my throat, and my hands clenched until the nails cut into the palms.

"I — am truly sorry," she said. "You have done so much —"

"No, no, no! What I have done was but trifling compared to this!"

I thrust my hand into my shirt front and drew out a blood-stained kerchief, which I pressed to my lips.

"And in a dim hallway some one fought to the death for me."

There was a half-smothered cry, and a wave of red suffused her face.

"Could you see —" She paused in confusion.

"All — the attack and retreat. And later I found the blade — and the clothes."

"You must forget it! Indeed, you must! Oh, the shame of it!"

"Oh, the *glory* of it!" I cried.

"But you must not delay. You can go forth now unmolested. If you will have it so, our debts to each other are paid. Captain, farewell."

She reached out one dainty hand, and I, great, rough fellow, seized it and bent low over it, kissing the soft fingers much too fervidly. And when I turned away the candles were dancing unsteadily through the mist that blurred my eyes.

But a voice in the hallway below brought a faint cry from the girl, and I paused, for well I knew those tones that were raised in the lilt of some German ballad.

"The Prince is coming!" Her words were heavy with despair.

"Have no fear," I said, the scent of danger fetching a smile to my lips, for in my present mood I would have welcomed action.

"Your disguise will not deceive him."

"Then I can fight," I replied.

"No, you must not." The singer was at the bottom of the stairs. "You must hide!"

"'Tis a poor word for a soldier to learn, I pledge you."

"But for *my* sake!" The singer was ascending the stairs. "You *will* for my sake?"

The struggle with my pride was sharp but

short. "You know you have but to command," I said. "I have run and dodged for you before. So will I now. Where?"

She had run to the doorway and looked hurriedly about. She faced me with cheeks of marble.

"There is not where" — She paused; then darting across the room, she jerked back the heavy curtains and revealed to me a daintily furnished bedroom. "Yes! In here! Quickly!"

"But they will search. I will be caught in a trap. Better had I fight now!"

"No, no! They will not dare to search *here*!" The scarlet was flaming in her cheeks again. "It is — my — sleeping-room." The singer was nearing the landing. "For *my* sake!" she whispered, and I plunged into the room, the curtains fell, and I was in gloom. And there I stood, listening to what took place beyond the curtains.

"Ah, did you, indeed, think your bride entitled to a moment of your time?" The question was in a playful, chaffing tone.

"Every moment has my heart been with you, my promised one," replied the Prince, his English smooth.

If I could but see! But how simple. I smiled as I cautiously pulled back one edge of the curtain. She had stepped towards the Prince, who had

paused to bow to her. How well he looked in his rich crimson satins, with immaculately white cuffs of lace, and a waistcoat of purest white silk!

"Every moment? Then pardon must be yours."

She laughed gaily, and I felt my heart throb with admiration. What a superb woman she was!

"Pardon? And nothing more? May I not have your lips, my beloved?"

He stretched out his arms, and 'twas well that he was not watching the curtain, for a man behind it clenched his hands so suddenly that the curtain was swayed violently.

"No, no!" she cried, springing aside. "That must not be until I am — your wife."

I looked at the Prince, and the flush in his cheeks told me the story of the wine-cup. A frown rested on his brow a moment, and then he laughed.

"Ach, well, 'tis not long I must wait." Then he looked about the room. "Your dear mother told me the minister was here."

"Oh, then you did not meet him on the stairway, did you?"

"On the stairway? I met no one. Where did he go?"

"He did not tell me where he was going, and I

did not notice him after he left this room, but I know he started towards the stairs."

"Soon he will return, and I am granted a few moments with you alone until then."

She sank into a chair and he seated himself close by, and they fell to discussing their plans for the future. God's love! Imagine standing still as a mouse and hearing another man telling the girl you love of the plans he has made for wedding her and taking her to foreign shores! The girl had seated herself facing the curtains, and from the pallor in her cheeks and the uneasy looks she shot to the curtains at intervals I knew that she was fearing the very thing that was in my heart — a fury that bade me throw aside the curtains and hurl myself at his throat. But the Langford eyes were ever eloquent and I read the plea in them. So I stood silent and smothered the flames within me.

Presently, there was a rustle of silks, and the mother entered. Where was the minister? He had left the room but a few minutes before. The old dame tapped the floor nervously with her foot and glanced sharply at the girl, evidently suspecting that she had conspired to delay the wedding, for I well knew that the mother would know no peace until Gayle Langford was a prin-



cess. A few more minutes and a burst of laughter and a chatter of voices announced the coming of the guests. I watched them enter, several officers in all of the glitter and conceit of the British and Hessian uniforms, and a few ladies with brocades and silks and towering head-dresses. The musicians assembled in the hallway and all was ready for the wedding — all save the clergyman who was to pronounce the ceremony. Gayle Langford moved about among her guests informally, chatting, laughing, never a serious look on her face, but ever she managed to hover close to the curtains, and, at intervals, I could see her flash a glance towards them.

The hour for the ceremony passed, and Mrs. Langford was near to hysterics at the absence of Collenbaugh. The Captain of the Guard was appealed to, and with clanking sword strode here and there, questioning, searching, while the others of the party promenaded in the hallway. Finally Colburn came back into the room and marched directly towards the room where I stood, but Gayle Langford, wary and watchful, turned, laughing, from the Prince's side and glided in front of the officer, laying her hand gently on his arm.

"Not that room, please, Captain," she whis-

pered, and smiled up into his face, the color once more mounting to her own cheeks. "'Tis my sleeping-room."

"And, therefore, most sacred," he responded, facing about.

There was a babble of voices again when the Captain of the Guard announced that the minister was not to be found. The guard had been changed but recently, and therefore it could not be learned when he had left the house. Mrs. Langford sought the consolation of tears, and begged her daughter to accept the services of an army chaplain.

"I will not this night," she declared. "Colonel Rahl's wine-flasks have been too seductive. Perhaps Reverend Collenbaugh may return. If not — then the chaplain at noon to-morrow, providing he is sober."

I smiled grimly at this, for I hoped that by noon on the morrow the Continental army would be masters in Trenton.

Then the musicians were ordered back to their former stations, and soon the gaities below were claiming attention. Mrs. Langford had been taken in charge by the other women, who vowed that she needed amusement, and the Prince was led away by Rahl, who locked arms with him

and swore that he must go below and sing them a jolly song. Gayle Langford alone remained, promising to join them presently.

As the last one descended the stairs the girl's laugh died on her lips, and, turning, she almost staggered back to a chair. Thrusting aside the curtains, I was kneeling at her side in an instant and pressing a fold of her garments to my lips.

"It was magnificent," I said, hoarsely.

"Please do not kneel there," she replied, wearily. "I want only that you should escape now."

"'Twill be most easy to dupe the guards outside if you can make sure that none of the officers are about the lower hallway."

"That will I do at once."

She arose and went to the stairway, I following close behind. Half-way down, she leaned over the banister rail, and after looking carefully about, turned to me.

"Your chance," she said, and I ran lightly down the stairs to where she stood. Then I paused, looking down into her face. Her eyes dropped, and she gave me her hand.

"It is farewell," she whispered.

I kissed the tips of her fingers. "It may prove so, and it may not," I replied, thinking of the

ragged battalions probably battling with the Delaware at that moment.

I hurried down the stairs, but at the door I looked back. She was standing where I had left her, clutching the banister with both hands, and for one brief instant her eyes burned into mine. Then I flung open the door and stepped boldly forth into the world without.

## CHAPTER XVII

“TOOK KEER O’ HER BOY”

**H**ARDLY had I closed the door behind me when I found a Hessian soldier confronting me.

“Ach, Gott! Is it not the preacher man they have been howling for?” he asked, in wretched English.

“Yes,” I answered, “but I was lying down asleep in a quiet place. I sat up late last night with a man who may not live to see another sun set.”

In truth, I had done that very thing. ’Twas Boyd — and who could tell who would be living and who dead after the coming battle?

“Well, I was told to watch for this preacher, but as you are coming out and not going in, of course it’s all right.”

“Of course,” I said. “It’s a bad night and I have some leagues to cover. Br-r-r! Good night.”

Without waiting for him to reply, I strode

away, fearful that some of the officers would be leaving the headquarters. The storm was increasing in violence and a strong north wind struck chill to the marrow of my bones. I soon reached the spot where I had tied my horse, and was rejoiced at finding the animal still there, though the poor beast was pawing, and tugging at the bridle in an effort to break loose. My pistols were dry, and in a moment I was in the saddle, my spirits bounding, for now I was quite ready to take my chances in a quick dash and a sudden firing if danger threatened.

Down the street I rode, my cloak wrapped closely about me, strains of music coming to me from the headquarters. The paper I had stolen from Collenbaugh passed me by the pickets without trouble, and soon I was away from the town and pounding along the country road. It was a hard journey that Christmas night, and I knew that stern work lay ahead of me before I was to know rest. I passed the deserted cabin where I had traded clothes with Collenbaugh, but well I knew that the unhappy clergyman was at that moment under guard in Trenton. Every moment I expected to meet the advance-guard of Washington's Continentals, and my heart grew heavier as mile after mile was passed and no sign

of them. But I found them at last, a shivering, suffering handful, crouched on the Jersey shore awaiting the coming of their comrades, who were crossing the river as rapidly as possible.

Seeking the Chief, I made my report, omitting any recital of the events that had befallen me in Rahl's headquarters.

The hours dragged by, the flat boats filled with soldiers having perilous voyages, and dawn was not many hours away when all of the little army were mustered on the Jersey shore, and then in two divisions and by separate roads we began our march on Trenton. In the unloading of artillery from the hay barges, a captain had suffered a broken leg, and it was ordered that he be taken to the farmhouse near by for shelter. This gave me the chance I had been wanting, and with a few words of explanation I secured his uniform in exchange for Collenbaugh's sombre garments.

Boyd sought my side. "Lester," he said, "mayhap there's a Hessian bullet in yon village awaiting me. If you come back — and I do not — you will see — Mary Wilmoth — and tell her —"

"Aye, comrade, fear not but that the maid shall learn that the thought of her stoutened the heart of a soldier to the very last."

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"And you, Lester; if you fall —"

"I have a great-uncle somewhere up Boston way. You might tell him. Doubtless 'twill please him that I escaped being hanged."

"'Tis a poor hour for a jest," said he, reproachfully.

"God's mercy! I remember of no hour that needed jest more than this," I answered, lightly.

"But is there no one to — to care?"

"None."

I saw him look at me as though about to speak, but no word passed his lips and we went forward in silence after that. The snow had about half turned to sleet and increased the misery of the plodding soldiers.

'Twas broad day when we halted a moment at the outskirts of Trenton. Then a report from General Sullivan that he was ready to strike on the other side of the town, and we went forward, soon being greeted by the sound of skirmish firing from beyond. It put life and warmth into the chilled bodies, and soon our own division was cheering merrily as we fought. Rahl tried desperately to rally his men and turn the tide of battle that had turned against him at the first volley, but he could not.

A Continental battery was dragged past me



and I saw the gunners training it on the building where but a few hours before the fiddles and the hautboys had made merry music.

"Don't fire; for God's sake, don't fire!" I shouted, throwing myself across the cannon.

"What ails the man?" exclaimed the commander.

"There are women there — in that house — the soldiers are in the streets!" I cried.

The muzzle was swung to one side and soon the gun was roaring. But little more than half an hour of bloody work, and word came that Rahl had struck his colors, and when the Hessian gave up his sword 'twas seen that his life would also soon be given up, for a wound in his breast was drenching his brilliant uniform with blood.

I made my way to the headquarters. No longer were cannons standing in front of the building. Here and there lay men to whom the struggle meant nothing further. Marks of bullets were plainly to be seen on the house, and a dread was upon me as I rushed up to the door. In the hallway I came face to face with old Erasmus.

"Glory be ter God!" he exclaimed. "Hyar's little Marse Ian! Glory be ter God!" And his black arms went about me in an embrace of unfaltering love.

"The Langfords, Rassel, what of them?"

"Dey's safe, suh, but de ol' Missus she might nigh skeered ter death, but, lawsee! Missy Gayle, she order de ol' Missus an' de oder women eroun' like er gin'ral, an' neber a squawk from her."

"And Mistress Gayle, where is she now?"

"She is here!" called a voice from the stairway. "I presume we are all prisoners. Have you shackles ready?"

There stood the little Tory, looking down at me, contempt plainly writ on her face.

"Prisoners for the present, I presume," I replied, bowing. "But my query was given voice only by my anxiety for your safety."

She made me a deep curtsy. "Most gracious of you, Captain, — or should I say *Reverend sir*?"

"Naught care I. Just so your mockery puts pleasure into your heart."

I turned on my heel, and, with chin high, marched into the adjoining room. The windows had been shattered by stray bullets and 'twas most dismal and cold there, the wind sweeping in with but slight hindrance. Erasmus had followed at my heels.

"Marse Ian," he said, catching my hand, "don' yer eber fergit dat dar's a God in heben."

Don' yer eber fergit. When dem guns gin ter racket an' de bullets was er singin' dem death-songs ol' Rassel flopped right down on his knees an' pray fer you. An' de louder dem cannons boomed de harder ol' Rassel pray fer de Lord ter push de bullets away from you. Marse Ian, yer ort ter learn ter pray."

I looked at the faithful old fellow a moment, and the tears I saw in his eyes as he pleaded softened my heart, which was hard and bitter enough at that moment.

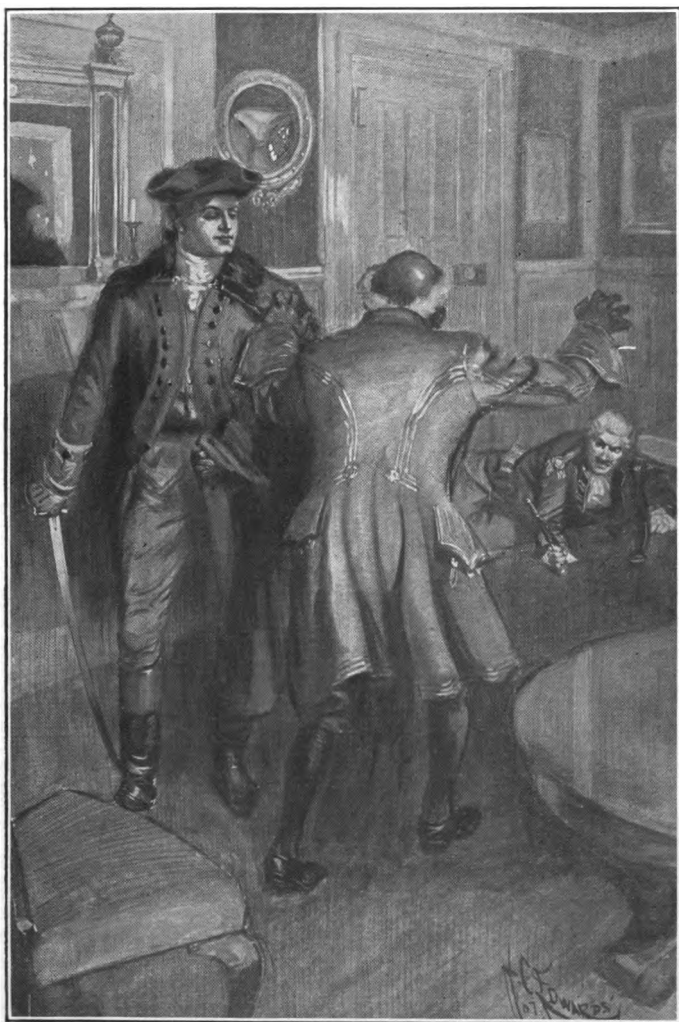
"Well, Rassel, I believe you are right. I haven't been to my knees since — since I was a boy. I always prayed then, Rassel — with my mother."

"Yes, 'deed you did, Marse Ian, I done 'member, an' bless de Lord you 'member."

A groan of agony startled me, and, wheeling quickly, I peered into a dim corner of the room, where I saw lying on the floor a form in the uniform of a Hessian officer. The form moved, and as I stepped forward the wounded man raised on one elbow.

"Erasmus! Come here at once, sir!"

'Twas the voice of Gayle Langford, and involuntarily I paused and looked towards the doorway.



**"OH, GOD! LOOK OUT, MARSE IAN!" — Page 335.**



"Yes, Missy, I'se comin' dis minute. I'se — Oh, God! Look out, Marse Ian!"

To my astonishment I saw the darky throw himself towards me with outstretched arms. Almost at the same instant came the report of a pistol, and with a horrible scream Erasmus spun around, clutching at his breast, and then plunged heavily to the floor. A puff of smoke was floating from the corner where the wounded Hessian lay, and clutched in his hand I saw a pistol.

"Damn you for an assassin!"

My pistol came from its holster with a jerk; my eye glanced along the barrel, but as the sights covered his brain-pan the finger that was curving about the trigger faltered in its pressure, for I had recognized the blood-streaked features of the Prince.

"I can't kill *you*!" I muttered, lowering my weapon. But with a spring I was at his side and had kicked the pistol from his hand. A hasty search proved that he had no other weapon, and as he fell back on the floor, mumbling a plea for mercy, I turned to old Erasmus. He opened his eyes as I knelt at his side.

"Marse Ian, — yer ain't — hurt?" he gasped.

"No, no. You — you caught the bullet."

In truth, I could speak but little better than he, for the sobs were choking me. A glance had told my experienced eye that Erasmus had given his life for mine. There was a scurry of feet on the stairway, a rustle of skirts, and Gayle Langford stood in the doorway, her face pale.

"What wretched thing has happened now?" she cried.

"Your servant has been wounded," I replied.

"You must not come in here."

"Who has done this? I must help him!"

She darted forward, but I rose and laid my hand on her shoulder, keeping my body between her and the corner where the murderer lay.

"Run and prepare a bed. I will carry him to it. Quick! It is cold here."

There was an instant's hesitation, and then she turned and ran out of the room. I knelt again by the darky.

"It ain't — cold — Marse Ian. Ain't de — wind from — de Souf? What? You'se gwine — ter pack ol' — Rassel?"

I had gathered him up in my arms and was starting for the stairway when an officer with a file of men appeared at the outer door. A few words, and one of the men was assisting me with my burden, while the others made the Prince a

prisoner. We laid our burden on the bed the girl had ready, and she set to work to stanch the blood that gushed from a wound in his breast. I knew that 'twas impossible to secure a surgeon's aid that early after the battle, and I also knew that no human being could defeat death in this struggle. I forced rum between his lips, and he rallied for a moment.

"Marse Ian — don' fergit when — yer prayed. It — was — how come it? — dis ain't Marse — Ian. It Marse Soldier! How — yes — ol' Rassel — done remember now. It — why — dar's de sweet ol' Missus — an' she smilin' — an' smilin' — yes — I done take — keer o' yer boy! Ol' Rassel — done — take keer — o' yer boy!"

He closed his eyes again and for a moment lay quite still, a moment in which there was no sound save the sobs of a girl who was kneeling with me beside this humble bit of clay from which the life God had breathed into it was slowly leaving.

"Yes, dear old friend," I said, huskily, holding his hand tightly in my own. "You have taken care of her boy. You have died for her boy!"

Gayle Langford looked at me in surprise. Then I saw that the truth was dawning on her.

"You?" she asked, and I nodded.



"Aye, he was in my father's family until — hush!" His eyes had opened once more, but in their stare there was no light of the present. His hands were outstretched feebly.

"Come hyar — li'l Marse Ian — ol' Rassel gwine — ter gib yer a ride — dar! on my back! Te, he, he! — See de — Missus smilin' — Oh, Lord, it cain't be — it — cain't — de ol' Marster — dead — on de *Eagle*." The girl buried her face in the pillow. The dying man's arms swayed to and fro. "Listen! Marse Ian — I hear de sweet — ol' Missus er singin' — singin' — an' de twilight — done come. Yes — right dar's whar — she's sleepin' — right un'erneath dem — sweet roses what ol' Rassel plant. She's — what? Marse Soldier — Ian — don' go ter — Langford's. Dey hates — dat — uniform. Yes — de ol' Missus smilin' at Rassel — fer he — he — done take — keer — her boy! Marse Ian — "

The wrinkled hand dropped at his side, there was a tremble of his lips and then he lay very still. Like a schoolboy I sobbed out my grief and wet the calm, dead face with my tears. The girl arose and went to the window and stood there, until I had straightened the old form and drawn a sheet over it.

"Who did this thing?" she asked, turning to me.

"A wounded Hessian," I replied, after a pause in which conflicting impulses rioted in my brain. "The bullet was aimed for my heart. Erasmus offered his. You had better seek your own room," I added.

"Have you seen or heard aught of — the Prince?" she asked.

"I saw him a prisoner."

For a few breaths there was silence; then I led her to the door, and, with a slight bow, she left me.

Seeking General Washington, I obtained permission to bury the body of Erasmus, and at mid-day a squad of my men lowered the black body into the grave, but the soul, fair as a lily, was beyond the skies. As the rude box rested in the bottom of the grave, the sergeant looked at me. I caught the look and dropped to my knees in the snow and offered an awkward, fervent prayer.

Diligently I sought to learn the fate of the Prince, but in vain. There was much confusion. Prisoners were being marched away, and every wagon was being filled with the wounded, while burial details were laying the dead to rest. We were to make a quick retreat back across the Delaware before the enemy could learn of the

blow and overwhelm us. Dejectedly I stood near headquarters awaiting the order to move, when a sudden commotion in a squad of prisoners attracted my attention.

“ ‘How long will ye imagine mischief against a man? Ye shall be slain, all of you: as a bowing wall shall ye be, and as a tottering fence.’ So saith the Psalmist.”

I started with surprise, and stepped closer. There in the group of prisoners stood the Reverend Jonathan Collenbaugh, still wearing my ragged uniform.

“He’s got us puzzled, sir,” said the lieutenant in command, responding to my question. “He wears the uniform but swears he is not a soldier, and it’s plain that he isn’t.”

“ ‘Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer; preserve my life from fear of the enemy.’ ”

The preacher stood among his fellow prisoners, hands clasped in front of him, his eyes uplifted towards the sky, the while the British and Hessians eyed him curiously.

“Probably a bit touched up here, sir,” said the lieutenant, tapping his forehead.

I laughed. “No, the fellow is sane enough. I took his clothes.” Without heeding the officer’s gasp of astonishment, I turned towards the

prisoner. "Collenbaugh!" I called. "Content your mind, for you shall soon be free."

He stared at me, and then recognition came to him.

"Thou evil one," he cried, raising one arm appealingly. "Hear the prayer of the Psalmist: 'Deliver me from the workers of iniquity and save me from bloody men!'"

"Within the hour," I replied. "Your handsome satins are lost to you, but let your heart be glad, for the wearing of them enabled a man to prevent a crime."

"Your words are mystery, but there is no thought of raiment in my mind. I like not the company of these men of carnal warfare."

I tarried not to exchange further words, but hurried to the Chief, where a hasty explanation, that lacked much of explaining all, secured an order for Collenbaugh's release. Already the bugles were sounding, and as I ran back to the group of prisoners the troops were on the move. Thrusting the order into the lieutenant's hands, I hastened to my own troop, now serving as infantry, and we took up the march back to the Delaware. Snow had again begun falling, and mercifully spread its mantle over the dark stains born of the battle.

Our march was past Rahl's old headquarters. A little knot of townspeople had gathered there to watch us pass, and my eyes eagerly searched for a mass of copper-tinted hair. She was not there. The wind bit at me cruelly, and the dreariness of it all was sinking deeper; snow slapped me like a taunt. But, God's love! That face at an upper window! The throb of my heart drove back the increeping wretchedness with a flood of something warm and exultant, the touch of the snow became a caress to my cheek, all because Gayle Langford stood looking down at me. Heigho! 'Tis a wondrous thing when youth's fires are in the veins. I flashed my blade in salute. There was no response, and once more the march was changed to a weary plod.

On, on, tramp, tramp! Then youth again conquered pride, and I turned and looked back. Dimly seen through the snowy veil was the mansion and — yes, it was true — Leaning far out from that upper window was Gayle Langford. And her face was towards me!

Then a flurry of snow danced between us and the picture was blotted out.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SETTLING AN ACCOUNT

**B**Y the mercy of God all bitter things pass away, and so winter's snows finally gave way to spring's sunshine. The birds came back to us, and the gladness of the season was trilled daily from a myriad of tiny throats. The ice had gone from the Delaware, and now when the Continentals voyaged across it the oarsmen lolled lazily at their work, and occasionally paused to idly skip rocks over the waves. The green had crept up into the grass, and from the much-neglected fields came the odor of freshly ploughed ground. In town and country the fruit-trees were carrying a mass of pink and white bloom, and the breath of the late April days was sweet with its fragrance.

Mary Wilmoth found the awakening of the world to the new season of life so filled with memories of the happiness of the old home that she spent much time walking about the city,

venturing as far into the outskirts as she deemed prudent, in order that she might revel in the delights Nature was spilling over the countryside. Each bird, each blossom, each tree whose branches whispered to the breezes, was as a dear friend to her, and with these as her daily companions she was ever blithe, and looked through the war gloom to the brightness of the sunshine. It was while on one of these rambles, as she told me afterwards, that her attention was attracted by the fluttering of a kerchief from a passing carriage. Almost at the same moment it stopped and Gayle Langford, leaning forward, smiled into her eyes.

“How fortunate, my dear Mary! You must sit here by me,” she called, gaily.

Mary ran to clasp the outstretched hand, and chattered her joy at the meeting, but her glance noted the gorgeousness of the equipage, the dainty stylishness of the other's attire, and then she dropped her eyes to her own plain, cheap dress. The contrast was quite apparent, and for an instant the light faded from her eyes.

“I thank you, but I — I think 'twere better that I continue my walk,” she said.

Gayle caught the droop of the eyes and readily understood.

"Indeed, I will not be denied!" she exclaimed. "I am quite petulant when my friends withhold from me a favor, so get right up here by my side, else you condemn me to an hour of tears because that on which my heart is set is refused me."

Laughing merrily, Mistress Mary sprang lightly to the seat and snuggled down beside the maid whose hauteur had sent many a mincing macaroni slinking away like a whipped boy.

"Your return to Philadelphia has been recent?" asked she as they drove onward.

"Yes. After the horror of the attack on Trenton we went to Boston for some weeks. We once lived there — when I was a little girl." A great cluster of blossoms which she held in her hand were raised to her face as though she would inhale their perfume.

"Trenton! Yes, it must have been terrible for you. Of course it was glorious for — our cause, but it meant so much to you. The battle came before there was a wedding, I understand."

"Yes, because of Trenton I am yet a maid."

Mary looked up into her companion's face and there was a soft glow of sympathy in her dark eyes.

"'Tis most sad to have such a shocking affair thrust between you and the man you love.



Richard — I — I mean Lieutenant Boyd — wrote me somewhat of it, though he said 'twas little he knew. He wrote that he thought Captain Lester had knowledge of it, but that he never would discuss the Trenton affair. Had we not better drive to your home? You are looking a trifle pale and wearied."

"No, no! 'Tis but your fancy. Lieutenant Boyd distinguished himself at Trenton, I heard."

"Oh, he was splendid, they say!" she cried, enthusiastically. "But he doesn't write me much about it, though he says that during all of it he was thinking of —"

She paused suddenly, and when Gayle looked into her face she saw the blood surging up into her cheeks.

"Thinking of what did you say?" she asked, smiling.

Mary suddenly seized her hand and pressed it between both of her own.

"Men say such extravagant things to maids, think you not so, dear Gayle?"

"But maids count them not extravagant. Is it not so?"

The girl at her side laughed in a sudden burst of exuberant spirits.

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"La, I am afraid we *are* most amazing fond of the extravagances," she replied.

"And Lieutenant Boyd—do you hear often from him?"

"Only one letter these ten days—and the postboy comes from Washington's camp twice a week," she replied, looking up with a pretty pout.

Gayle smiled, and, bending her head suddenly, kissed the maid.

"Then you love him very dearly, do you not?" she said.

Mary raised her head quickly, a startled look in her eyes, the while her cheeks grew rosier.

"Why—I—do not know. It is a very serious thing to be—in love—isn't it?" She paused and looked down at her fingers, which she interlaced a bit nervously. Her companion made no answer, but sat very still. "And I do not feel at all serious," she continued, looking up again, and smiling. "I am just happy all the time—like my canary, that sings the gladness each new day puts into its heart. Is that love? If it is it must be a most wonderful thing, don't you think?"

"Yes—love *is* a most wonderful thing." The blossoms were pressed to her face again. "And a most blessed thing when it comes thus.

But not always does love put music into the heart. Sometimes love means — pain." Her voice was very low and the words ended in but little more than a whisper.

"But how can it mean pain if it is given us by God? You see I am a bit simple in my beliefs, for it has ever been my thought that God gave us love." She was looking up into Gayle Langford's face, wistfulness in her eyes.

"Bless you, my sweet, if 'tis simplicity, then is simplicity truth. But do not let any 'whys' burden your tongue nor hush your song. God sends us both the rain and the sunshine and counts them equally blessed."

Mary sat silent for a moment, looking away, but she saw not the houses, nor the trees, and she heard not the crunch of the carriage wheels.

"I wonder if — if — 'tis *really* love," she said at last, slowly. Then she turned again to Gayle. "Will you think me a most bold and immodest maid if I tell you that I once thought I was near to — loving — Captain Lester? There, you have dropped those beautiful blossoms!"

Gayle stooped to gather up the scattered bloom, and, somehow, the blossoms seemed difficult to secure, for she fumbled after them an unexpected length of time, her face averted. Then she

leaned back and inhaled the fragrance of the bloom.

"Captain Lester! Ah, true, he is a most gallant soldier."

"Yes, he is splendid, but then — Richard — is — well, he is just *Richard!*" And then they both laughed.

"Now that we have met once more you must promise to come often to see me," said Gayle.

"Oh, I will be delighted. In these dreadful times one so loves friends. And you seem so strong and wise. You see, I always confided in my brother, but — the war, you know."

Mistress Langford laughed again. "I fear I cannot take your brother's place. I am unacquainted with the accomplishments of brothers unless it be — " She stopped in confusion.

"Unless it be what?"

"The art of fence. Are you shocked?"

"Indeed, no. Are you skilled in it?"

"To a fair degree. My father never quite forgave me for not being his son instead of his daughter, and he vowed I should be taught to fence 'like a gentleman.' So I was tutored by a master of the art, and, in truth, I liked it."

"I have heard that many maids in the cities have learned it."

"The exercise is amazingly beneficial — and sometimes a bit of skill with a rapier is valuable in other ways."

"But, Gayle, look! Is there not something familiar about yon horsemen?"

Two Continental officers had turned a corner ahead of them at a sharp trot. Mistress Langford looked and the bloom fled from her cheeks.

"Captain Lester!" she gasped.

"Richard!" cried Mary.

Aye, it was, indeed, we. The Congress had crept back to Philadelphia after Washington's brilliant successes at Trenton and Princeton, but so weak-kneed were they that the Chief was constantly pestered with pleas — not actual demands — for a stronger force in the city, until finally he ordered a troop of horse to the capital, and Boyd and I officered it. And now that we were settled in our new quarters Boyd was wild for a canter through the streets he knew so well. We spied the carriage and recognized its occupants at the same instant.

"Sword of Washington!" exclaimed Boyd.  
"A petticoat truce!"

And then we found ourselves springing from our mounts beside the carriage and sweeping our hats low in profound bows.

"The fortunes of war are not always ill," I said.

"A surprise, truly," said Mistress Gayle, not ungraciously. "We did not dream —"

"Ah, no," broke in Boyd. "'Twas the grave members of the Congress who dreamed — of my Lords Howe and Cornwallis. And we were ordered here to quiet their slumbers."

And then our tongues wagged at a most prodigious rate, but naught was spoken of Trenton till we were about to mount again, and then Mistress Gayle leaned towards me and asked, hesitatingly, if I had lately visited the grave of Erasmus.

"'Tis growing green," I replied. "I — knelt there — less than a fortnight ago."

Gayle Langford's eyes were lowered, but as we swung into our saddles I saw a tinge of color steal into her cheeks. Then as they drove away, Mary Wilmoth turned and smiled back at Boyd.

"My friends will always be welcome at our home," she called.

I was watching Gayle Langford. She half-turned, as though on impulse, and then, seeming to catch herself, she faced to the front once more, and as the carriage rolled away I saw her head go up to the old proud poise.

We rode mostly in silence until we once more dismounted at headquarters. Then Boyd stood for a moment looking himself over in a critical manner.

"I must get a new uniform," he said, reflectively. "This faded and patched rig-out will do very well for the field, but here — Yes, I'll get a new one at once."

I laughed, but 'tis doubtful if he heard me, for he was slapping his thigh with his riding-whip and humming softly to himself.

During the next week I found time to call on the Wilmoths and pay my respects, but I did not meet Gayle Langford. When I took my departure I told myself that I was glad I had not encountered the little Tory, but as I trudged back towards my quarters, lost in a maze of thought, I suddenly admitted to myself that 'twas an unusual route I was following to reach my destination — for there before me was the Langford home. The hour was not late; I had just heard the watch call the hour of nine. The night was clear, the sky starlit, the air balmy.

A few lights were to be seen about the Langford home, and in front of the main doorway a lantern was burning. Would I ever cease being a fool, I asked myself as I found myself standing under one of the trees in the grounds.

Aye, a harsh word it was and ever distasteful to me, but it was being whispered into my ears that moment from out of the night, just as it had been whispered to me in many other moments before. Many a night had I lain dreaming of the baffling little witch, then awakened to find the camp-fire casting strange shadows, from out of which nameless, formless things seemed croaking at me, "Thou fool!" "Thou fool!" And now they were whispering it again from the leaves that rustled above me, from the rose-bushes that marked the Langford gardens; and the plaintive cry of a restless night-bird came to me as a jeer.

Through the stillness of the night I heard the faint plashing of a fountain, and it seemed but a mocking echo of a night — was it but nine months before? — a night that had become a sacred memory to me, for by that fountain I had held in my arms — yes, I was a fool to come here now.

I turned my back to the house, but had taken but one step when I shrank back against the tree and strained my eyes into the gloom. Surely I was not mistaken. No, there it was again, a shadowy form that darted from tree to tree and crawled slowly across the wider spaces, but always working towards the house. Cautiously I



began the same tactics, keeping directly in the rear of the other, and clutching my sword scabbard firmly lest a clank betray me. Closer we drew to the house, until the faint glow of the lantern revealed to me the familiar uniform of a Continental officer. Finally he reached the last tree and stood in its shadow a moment, while I crouched beside another not far away, mystified. What could it mean? Was this home, once the Tory headquarters in Philadelphia, still suspected, and was this man here to spy, even though the leader of it all had lain in his grave these many months?

The figure stepped away from the tree a pace and I saw his arm swing. Then, "spat!" went a stone against the tin of the lantern, swaying it violently, but failing to extinguish the light, evidently the fellow's object. I heard him mutter a curse at his failure, and then he walked boldly forward while I darted to the tree where he had stood. Now he was plainly revealed to me in the lantern's light, and I cudgelled my brains to determine where I had seen that figure before. It was strangely familiar, but his back was towards me. If only he would turn his face.

Acting on a sudden thought, I clanked my scabbard against the tree. Instantly he wheeled

about, and a gasp of surprise escaped me as I found myself staring at the face of the Prince.

Like a flash I saw the truth. He had escaped from prison and had in some way secured the uniform for a disguise. Naturally, he was seeking refuge in the Langford home. Only an instant he gazed back into the shadows, and then turned and hurried towards the house, but with a bound I was after him.

He was in the full glow of the lantern when he heard me coming, and wheeled, the blade he wore at his side being whisked from its sheath as he did so. My own steel flashed as I sprang to face him, and for a breath we stood with set jaws, eying each other, and 'twas plain that neither of us doubted that we were to duel to the death.

"On guard!" I cried. "I do not murder!"

"No, — you die!" he rasped.

There was a shower of sparks as our steel met. In my mind was a stolen uniform with despatches, and another vision of a lonely grave at Trenton where Erasmus slept. My attack was so savage that I soon forced him back to where the shadows lay, but I saw my mistake, and, feigning weakness and failing courage, I began to retreat step by step, firing him with the belief that he could soon run me through, and thus drawing him slowly

back to the light, and there I stopped and began measuring my skill with his.

He was eager and his lust for my life dulled his cunning. Fighting carefully, I saw his guard falter, and there was a glitter on my blade as I slipped it straight for his heart — but turned my wrist at the last instant just in time to slit his waistcoat instead of his heart. 'Twas purposely done, but why? The query I could scarcely answer myself.

Soon I realized that I was his master in the art of fence, and the low laugh that escaped me maddened him until my blade once more pinked him, this time on the arm, though I could as well have run him through. The fellow had earned death. His murderous treachery at Trenton had forfeited his life, if there had been no other scores to settle. But should I be his executioner? In my heart the cry was sounding, "If he dies Gayle Langford may be won!"

A sweat oozed out on my brow, not because of the enemy before me, but because of the struggle with the enemy within me. With that personal desire in my heart, would it be execution or murder if I slew him? And Gayle Langford loved him in spite of all. Of that I was certain. Could I give his life to her — to the girl who had pelted

me with pebbles in Boston's streets, and whose memory I had hated? These thoughts raced like lightning flashes through my mind as we duelled. He was tiring, I could see; the play of his blade was slackening, and the fear of death was dilating his eyes. I laughed again in mockery.

"I trust your Highness remembers Trenton," I taunted.

There was no reply, but his arm stiffened and the sneer nerved him to better work, until he had me fighting at my best paces. Again hope shone in his eyes. Click! Click! z-z-z-zh — Click! The sparks played merrily. Then of a sudden I heard a rattle at the door, and springing aside for an instant I shot a glance there, and saw Gayle Langford step out, then clasp her hands with a cry of horror as she took in the scene and recognized the fighters. Then our blades met again, and I caught a glimpse of her flying down the steps towards us.

"Stand back!" I cried, waving my left hand towards her.

"Ach! You shall see the rebel die!" exclaimed the Prince.

Again he attacked with murderous fury, and again I pricked his arm and laughed. Then I caught his blade in a weak position, there was a

swift downward thrust of my own steel, a sudden twist, and I had sent his blade whirling from his hand. I dropped the point of my sword to the ground, and, turning, bowed to the girl, who stood mute, horror writ on her face.

"I give his life to you," I said.

Before she could reply, there were shouts on the streets and the sound of men running. Swinging my sword overhead, I dashed the lantern to pieces.

"Into the house — you," I called to the Prince. "Our little play has been seen."

Hardly had he obeyed than one of the watch came running up the walk, followed by a motley crowd of idlers. I stepped between them and the girl.

"A moment too late," I said. "The cut-throat has escaped."

"I saw a duel," said the watch.

"Yes, a robber attacked this young lady. I heard her scream and ran to her aid. We fought till he heard you coming, then he dashed the light out and fled — in that direction." I pointed down towards the trees beyond the house, and the thick-heads went streaming away into the shadows. Then for the first time Gayle Langford spoke.

"You are generous," she said, simply.

"Good night," I replied, replacing my sword and bowing to her. Then I turned and walked away.

The burning tobacco was glowing in the bowl of my pipe when Boyd entered our quarters an hour or two later. His uniform was spotless, and his face was abeam with smiles. Ignoring the chair he sat down on an edge of the table and hummed a bit of gay song. The signs were unmistakable.

"I am waiting to hear the news. Out with it."

He crushed his hat in both hands and a faint flush showed in his cheeks.

"Ah, Lester, everything is all right now. I told her — I mean I asked — that is —"

"Never mind, comrade. I know. And she gave herself to you?"

"Doesn't seem as though it could be true, does it, Lester? But she did. Yes, she did, she did."

He was crushing that poor hat frightfully in his enthusiasm, but I did not remind him of it. Somehow, no words came to me, and I sat with elbow on table, my chin in hand, staring at the flickering candles.

"Hang it, man, haven't you a word of con-

gratulations?" he cried. "Just because you know nothing of love, must you make a sphinx of yourself?"

"No, no, Boyd. A pardon for my rudeness, though 'twas not intended. I am glad for you — I congratulate you with my whole heart." I clasped his hand, and he smiled at the fervor of my words.

"I believe you mean every word," he said. "I spoke too sharply, I know, but you can't realize what all of this means to a fellow, Lester. Of course you have but one love — the army. You have no thought for the love of woman."

He paused as though expecting me to speak, but I was filling my pipe again and made no answer, so he continued:

"After this war is over the Colonies will need an army, and your thoughts are all for your military career. 'Tis proper enough, I am sure, but I care naught for it. I want the love of a wife, a home with a cheerful hearth — and, mayhap, children playing about me. You see we are very different."

"Yes — very different," I replied, slowly, watching the smoke wreaths, and, 'fore God, from each ring Gayle Langford was looking down at me.

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"But once I thought differently, Lester," he said, with a laugh. "You know I once thought you in love with that little Tory, Gayle Langford."

I blew half a dozen smoke rings.

"Really? Oh, yes, come to think of it, I remember that you did."

All the happiness that was bubbling in his heart was revealed to me during the next half-hour and then he said he was going to bed. In the adjoining room I soon heard him singing softly:

"My lover is a soldier lad,  
King George's crown he's scorning.  
He rides and fights with Washington  
In Liberty's bright morning."

Long I sat there, pondering. "Of course you have but one love — the army," he had said. I cared naught for love of wife, for the joy of a home! And I had duelled with a man and given his life to her! From the west came the low rumble of thunder, and as I walked to the window a flash of lightning burned along the horizon. I hoped it would rain; I wanted it to storm — the lightning to set the sky in flames, and the wind to shriek in fury. The calm was maddening.



## CHAPTER XIX

### INTO THE NEW DAY

**M**Y nervous lust for action was gratified early the next morning, when orders from headquarters sent me a-riding with a small detachment over into Jersey, and for nearly a week we were busy swooping down on Tory communities and posting broadsides issued by the Congress. But it was tame business, after all, this threatening and warning a people not courageous enough to espouse the cause of either Patriot or Briton. And then we pounded back to Philadelphia, leaving behind us scowls and sullen yielding to the orders posted.

The storm I had prayed for burst upon us at twilight while we still were an hour's ride from the city, but there was nothing to do but take it, and so I rode on, with the troopers splashing along behind me, their curses in my ears. In truth, we were a wretched-appearing party when I directed

the sergeant to dismiss them, and turned towards the headquarters, where I found light and life and music, for the commander was giving a ball to his officers and a number of civilians.

"Get into dry garments and join us, Lester," he said, when I had finished my report. "There'll be some bonny wenches here to-night with roguish eyes and lips like the crimson of a rose petal. You will forget your present misery in a flirtation — and mayhap a buss from rosy lips."

"Mayhap a buss from rosy lips!" Oddly enough those were the words that kept running through my mind later as I peeled my soaked garments off and got myself into a uniform that was dry. Somehow the words came to me with the odor of midsummer clinging to them, and I saw again the brilliance of the Langford mansion on that July night when the rebel captain audaciously made his bow to the haughtiest maid in all the Colonies and claimed her for the minuet. That night I had clutched and vigorously pulled the string that unwound a skein of trouble for me, and the more desperately I had tugged at it the more complicated had become my vexations. But now the end of the skein had been reached, and in a duel a few nights ago I had cleared myself of all its entanglements and flung it from me.

"Mayhap a buss from rosy lips." I smiled. Thus the sentence had marked the beginning and ending of a chapter of heartaches and woe.

In truth, 'twas a right brilliant assemblage that danced and chatted and flirted at the commander's ball. Once the wail of the hautboys and the sob of the fiddles seemed to whisper to me of Trenton, but I shut that out from memory and revelled in the present. I felt a light touch on my arm, and turned to find Mary Wilmoth smiling up at me.

"La, Captain, I scarce could believe 'twas you. Rich — Lieutenant Boyd told me you were in the saddle — out there." She waved her hand towards the window, where the rain was beating.

"A merciful Providence saved us from all except one hour of it," I replied, bending over her fingers. "You are radiant to-night. I dare not attempt to tell you how radiant lest Dick challenges me for a meeting at dawn."

She tossed her head. "I think you alarm yourself needlessly about Lieutenant Boyd. Why he — he has danced twice with other maids this night."

"'Tis most astounding!" I cried, laughing. "Then I will challenge *him*. To think the young scamp should have such ill taste!"

"He said the officers would chaff him if he

danced always with me. They wouldn't be so horrid, would they, Captain? But I wouldn't care. He is splendid, Richard is, and — maybe — maybe the war will take him — from me — soon."

"Tut, tut, Mistress Wilmoth! A soldier's sweetheart must think only of the glory he fights to win for her. For what is glory — what is anything in the world to a man if he cannot kneel and place it at some woman's feet and see her smile on him for his tribute? "

She laughed merrily, and made me a deep curtsy.

" 'Tis most gracious, your speech, Captain, and I will think no more sad thoughts. But I don't want Richard to lay honors at my feet. I want — just him."

"Would that I could have my wishes so quickly answered," I responded. "For yonder comes the scamp with his soul in his eyes."

She turned to greet him, and just a wee bit of envy of their great happiness crept into my heart as I noted the glow that came to her cheek and the smile that revealed the scarlet of her lips and the whiteness of her teeth. By Boyd's side was a tall young officer wearing the uniform of a captain of Continentals.

"Welcome back to the fold, Lester!" exclaimed

Boyd, clasping my hand. "Let me introduce Captain Wilton Hawley."

I doubt if he ever knew whether we acknowledged the presentation or not, for the last word was scarce off his tongue until he had given his arm to Mary Wilmoth and was leading her away, his head bent close to her ear. For a breath Captain Hawley and I both turned to watch the pretty picture, and then we smiled — but spoke no word concerning them.

"Let us step into the smoking-room and have a pipe," said my new acquaintance. "I believe we have met before, Captain Lester."

"I think not," I replied, as we seated ourselves and lighted pipes. "Though in truth, now that I look hard at you, there is something familiar about you."

He smiled and blew a smoke ring upward. "Perhaps I am mistaken. The man I knew was a daredevil chap who would have been a bloody corpse at the Red Fox inn — there, you dropped some ashes on your coat! — had not a girl whispered a cunning falsehood to the knave who was about to slay him. This little fib made him appear more valuable alive than dead."

"How the devil know you this?" I cried, springing to my feet.

"How? Well — perhaps I see it pictured in the smoke. One can see much in smoke. Sit down. I would tell you more about the man I took you to be."

I sat down, and stared at him, vainly trying to recall where I had met him, and wondering who could have told him the tale of the Red Fox inn.

"The girl — ah! what a girl she was, Captain! God has made but few of her pattern! — had been spared from a brutal fate when it was found that she was the fiancé of the real chief of the knaves. I believe they called him Prince somebody. And in the room to which she was hurriedly shown after a massacre she found a suit of boy's clothing and a rapier, which the landlord had forgotten. With these —"

"No more! Tell me who you are!" I had dashed the pipe to the floor and was gripping the back of my chair with a fury of impatience.

He arose slowly to his feet, laid his pipe aside carefully, and then looked me full in the face.

"Draw on your imagination a little," he said. "Imagine a straw-colored shock of hair in place of this powdered wig; imagine all ill-fitting, cheap homespun garments instead of this uniform; and then — this:"

He thrust his hand into his bosom and drew forth a hickorynut shell "cricket," and I saw his eyes suddenly grow dull and his face expressionless. Then he began strumming the "cricket" with his fingers and executing a silly sort of dance as he chanted:

"Wild hawk caught a game-cock in a pen —  
Hi-lo-diddle-de-dee.

But game-cock was saved by the clucking of a hen —  
Hi-lo-she saved him did she."

I was on my feet, staring in astonishment.

"By all the gods! *Rhymer!*" I shouted.

Then the light came back to his eyes, his face resumed its normal expression, and he slapped his thigh as he broke into a ringing laugh.

"At your service, Captain," he said, bowing. "Shall you challenge me for inflicting those doggerel rhymes on you?"

"Doggerel, perhaps, but always expressive," I replied.

"Well, sometimes I did manage to inject a warning into the horrid jingles. But I must leave you now — I have this dance with a Bright Eyes."

He hurried away, and I sat alone, smoking and thinking it all over. There was no music in my

feet that night, and dance after dance was measured off while I sat there. Boyd found me still wooing my pipe.

"Dick," I said, "what know you of Captain Hawley?"

"Precious little. One of the shrewdest men in Washington's secret service, they say. Ever meet him before?"

"Yes — once." More smoke rings.

"Well, he is partly responsible for my having a devilish unpleasant detail."

I looked at him inquiringly.

"It's a stone wall, a blindfold, and a volley — for another poor devil. I'm to command, 'Fire!'"

"An execution? Who? When?"

"Thirty-six hours from now — at noon Wednesday. You know that precious nobleman of Gayle Langford's escaped — or was that after you went over into Jersey? You heard of it? Well, this secret-service captain ferreted out the man who permitted him to escape and then furnished him with clothing and equipment. What did you say?"

"Nothing — nothing! Go on!"

"Well, Hawley found out the first part of it, and then one of the watch identified him as a man he had seen with Gayle Langford that same



night. The fellow had fought with some knave, and the watch saw it and ran right up to him. He says the lantern was smashed, but he positively identifies him. 'Tis a serious thing at this critical point of the war, and the court martial says he is to die. A courier returned from the Chief yesterday. Washington is visiting the cantonments and is now at Princeton. He approves the sentence. 'An example,' he says, but I like not the detail. Ugh! To pour lead into a blindfolded — God's name! what ails you? "

The last words I heard as I dropped my pipe on the table and dashed from the room. Officers and ladies paused in the dance to stare at me as I ran across the ballroom floor, surely a strange spectacle. Down the stairs I plunged, three steps at a bound, and then out of the building. An orderly's horse stood tethered close by, and, jerking the reins loose from the post, I sprang into the saddle and galloped away towards the Langford home, but my heart sank as I came in sight of the place, for not a light was to be seen. Throwing myself from the saddle, I ran up the walk to the house and thundered at the heavy doors. Again and again the ponderous knocker sounded its summons, but no response came.

As I look back at it now, I confess that I cursed

wildly as I hammered like a madman at that door, cursed and thundered in rage and despair. Then my arms fell at my side and my head sank down on my chest and I stood there baffled. The rain beat down on me, but I paid it no heed. Gayle Langford was gone. No need to ask where — or why. Doubtless at this very hour she and the Prince were making their way along some lonely road in an effort to reach the coast. And a man was to die for that which she could deny. Perhaps he had been guilty to some extent — but, God's name! was I innocent, and was he to shoulder his blame and mine? Doubtless he was some country yokel whom the Prince had dazzled by lying promises, but I — There was defence for him; for me, none.

I rode slowly back to headquarters unmindful of the rain and storm, my thoughts whirling. Once more in the commandant's office, I sent an orderly for him. He came, frowning and in ill humor at being disturbed in the dance.

"Well, what the devil causes you to send for me, Captain?" he asked, sharply.

"A question of life or death," I replied. "I learn a man has been condemned —"

"Rightly. He's to be an example. Washington approves."

"Yes — but if some one else could be found who would confess to guilt?"

"Then there would be two face the volley. This man is guilty. No such trick as that will be sufficient to gain time for him."

There was a rustle of skirts, and a piquant, pretty face looked in at the doorway.

"Colonel, are you going to hide yourself in this dismal room when the music is sounding for our dance?"

"No, no. I am coming now. Anything else, Captain?" He turned towards the door. In my brain I heard Boyd's words, "Washington rests at Princeton."

"Yes," I cried, "give me two days' leave and a pass to Washington."

"What folly is this?" he asked, halting.

"No folly! Grant my request and I will free one man or give you two for the bindfolds."

"Please hurry, Colonel," came the woman's voice. "But if you have no care — very well."

There was another rustle, and 'twas evident she was leaving.

"Coming this moment!" he called, starting towards the door. "You shall have your wish in the morning, Captain, I am engaged now."

"No, no, no!" I shrieked, springing after him

and clutching his arm. " 'Twill be too late! What is the dance to a life? "

He shook my hand roughly from his arm. " Captain, do not forget yourself! I said, in the morning. Coming, my dear! "

He was gone. The lure of a woman's eyes, the scarlet of a woman's lips, the purr of a woman's voice, had seduced him from duty and sent one man to his death — and, mayhap, another to a madhouse. God! Could I hear the drums roll the death-march and keep my reason? Could I hear that awful volley echo, and live to remember it through all of my life? There was a gleam of lightning at the window and a gust of wind slapped the pane with a dash of rain.

How I reached a chair I could never remember, but I found myself in a chair, my arms sprawled out on the commander's desk, my head on one arm. Before me lay a pile of reports, bearing his signature. Then like a flash I saw hope! Seizing paper and pen I began to carefully imitate that signature. Once, twice, thrice — over and over again I wrote it, slowly improving, until at last I was satisfied. To write out the credentials I wished was but the work of a moment, but I hesitated at the forgery. But only for a breath, and then with bold flourish I placed his name to

it. 'Twas done, and now of a surety had all of my honorable service come to naught. But down yonder in a prison was a man who counted the hours that lay between him and a volley! A long cape hung on the wall, and this I snatched as I came to my feet, thrusting the forged pass into my pocket, and then with the cape wrapped about me I soon was riding away into the night and storm.

Soul of me, but 'twas a beastly night, and my cape but illy protected me from the storm. At the bridge I was challenged, but a hasty glance at my paper caused the picket to shout, "Ride on — and the Lord pity you." Then I was away, riding furiously where the road permitted, and swearing savagely where the rain had made almost bottomless pits of the road.

The crowing of roosters came to my ears from a farmhouse as I floundered by, and I knew 'twas midnight or a little past. I could not spare horse-flesh, and the poor beast was lashed and goaded fearfully, but at Trenton I would change mounts — did my present one live to carry me there. Mile after mile was put behind us, and I found myself wondering how Gayle Langford fared that evil night. Once, on such a night, she had huddled down in a boat, with me. To-night — ? Was she

in the saddle braving the storm, or was she in a coach, snuggled down beside the Prince, unmindful of the night and its woes; happy in the fact that they were together, going away from tragedy to love and joy? I found my teeth hard set, my riding-whip lashing the horse cruelly.

A faint gray was showing where the sky in the east came down to the earth; the lightning no longer gleamed; and the rain was slackening, but the road was little less than a long ribbon of soft, oozy mud, that stretched away between rail fences seemingly to the end of the world. The gray crept higher into the dripping sky, and this time the crowing of the roosters proclaimed the coming of dawn. Presently I could count the trees that showed like huge dark streaks on a curtain of drab, and in the lightening gloom I saw that my horse's head was drooping low, its nostrils distended, and occasionally there was a stumble not due to the road, but to the exhaustion that was claiming the beast.

But still the animal struggled onward, and I sat coaxing and urging, and straining my eyes for the first glimpse of Trenton. At last it came. Before me was a small cluster of houses; then more and more, until I found myself riding a

staggering horse through Trenton's streets in the semi-dawn.

Uncertain which way to turn in seeking a fresh mount, I rode on until I found myself close to a building I well remembered, for 'twas the one where Rahl had had his quarters. To my surprise, I saw sentinels in Continental uniform slowly pacing beats in front and at the sides of the house. I had not known there was a soldier in Trenton. As I reined in beside one of the sentinels he noted my rank and came to a salute.

"Where can I find a fresh mount?" I asked. "I must get to Princeton ere General Washington leaves."

"You might as well dismount, then, for the Chief has already left Princeton, sir."

"Left Princeton? Then —"

I did not finish the sentence. A sudden dizziness rushed over me and only a quick clutch saved me from pitching from the saddle.

"Aye, left Princeton — and he is now sleeping in this house!"

I sat staring at him, unable for the moment to grasp the fullness of his words. Then I fairly tumbled to the ground.

"God be praised!" I mumbled, for now that I was on my feet I found that I was well-nigh

ready to sink from exhaustion. I dropped the bridle-reins and stumbled weakly towards the door, but the sentinel barred my way.

"I must speak to Washington at once!" I exclaimed.

"Impossible, sir, he is sleeping."

"Then he must be called. 'Tis life or death!"

"Not at this hour."

"Damn this heartlessness that will let a man die rather than yield a few moments of selfishness. First it is a dance, and next it is the ease of a pillow — and a man counting his hours!"

I was blazing with fury, and my words must have been shouted, for I heard a window above me go up, and, glancing up, I saw the face of General Washington peering out at me.

"What is the fuss?" he asked, quietly.

"I must have speech with you, sir!" I cried.

"A man's life depends on it."

"Then step into the office below and I will be down in a moment."

The sentinel saluted and I entered the house, turning from the hallway into a room I well remembered, for there had Erasmus remembered his promise to my mother to "take keer o' her boy." I fell into a chair and gazed moodily about the room in the faint light that stole in at the



windows. Presently there was a step on the stairs, and the next moment General Washington entered the room. I came to my feet.

"Now your story — ah, Captain Lester, is it not?"

He held out his hand to me in a kindly way, but I did not take it.

"No, no, sir. Not your hand — until you have heard me. Then you will not offer it."

He looked at me a moment, and then seated himself.

"Very well, then let me hear you," he replied.

"'Tis a story, sir, of a man who became a fool because he loved a woman."

He smiled. "A common enough tale, Captain."

Then there was a moment of silence until I found my tongue and launched upon a recital that caused him to clasp and unclasp his hands several times and to stroke his chin meditatively. I told him of it all, how I had lost my despatches while duelling for her; how I stole her away from the rabble that night after the Declaration; of her fight for me in the dark hallway of the Red Fox inn, and her message in blood that saved me. I told of the affair in Trenton Christmas night, and of the night I had followed sentiment and found myself in the Lang-

ford grounds, where I had met the Prince. I spared myself not at all, but admitted I could have slain him and would not.

"My personal desire would have made it murder," I said in conclusion.

"But he was disarmed. You could have returned him to prison," he said.

"That is why I am here, sir. I gave him to her."

He arose and paced the floor in silence. Finally he paused before me.

"This is your second offence, Captain Lester. Are you prepared to meet the consequences of what you have just told me?"

"I am, sir, and ask only that the life of that condemned soldier be spared. The poor yokel is less guilty than I."

"I must take a brief while to consider this, for—"

An orderly scratched on the door. "A lady to see you, sir."

"I cannot see her now!" exclaimed the Chief impatiently. "I suppose she wants her husband to come home and plough!"

"Beg pardon, sir, but I don't think so. Your pardon again, sir, but it will take a squad to keep her out. She has already lashed one of my mates

with her riding-whip because he tried to stop her."

A grim smile played about the lips of the commander.

"Then I suppose I must see her in order to save my soldiers. Show her in — but take the riding-whip away from her."

He smiled again, and then glanced at me. "Captain, you may withdraw until I have seen this female fury. In the adjoining room you will find food on the table. You must be famished. Step in and help yourself until this interview is ended."

I bowed, thrust aside the curtain dividing the two rooms, and seated myself at the table. The food was not warm, but bread and butter and cold fowl, with a bit of wine, is a royal breakfast to one worn and weary as I was. From beyond the curtain came the sound of voices, but I heeded them not. 'Twas food I wanted, and already it and the wine were putting new life into me. Then suddenly the bread fell from my hand and I sat back from the table, listening. The voice of the woman had come to me like an electric shock.

"He did it all for me!"

'Twas not the wine nor the food that sent the

blood a-bounding through my veins. 'Twas the voice of Gayle Langford!

In a trice I was at the curtain, and peeping cautiously into the other room. God's name! I wonder to this day how I kept from betraying myself, for there before me stood Gayle Langford facing General Washington. She wore a rain-drenched riding-habit, which clung to her slender figure, and her dull-copper hair had tumbled and been blown into a disorder that was most bewitching. Her cheeks were aglow, and her eyes were speaking more than her tongue.

"You shall not take his life! You shall not! He has given so much to his country — to these Colonies he loves! You do not know how he became a man on the *Eagle's* deck, nor how he hated a girl who shouted 'Long live King George,' but I know — I know — and yet he spared this — prisoner, and gave him life and liberty for the sake of that same girl!"

Her hands were clasped, she was leaning forward, with every nerve plainly at highest tension as she spoke rapidly, forcefully, her eyes fixed on the face of the man before her.

"And why have you come here?" Washington's tones were calm and methodical.

"Why?" she cried. "Why? Because —

because I love him — aye, love him — because, if he dies, the same volley shall take my own life! You are the great Washington of whom I have heard so much, and you know something of duty. I have tried to follow it, — to give myself to this other because my father and my mother wished it, — but I have sent him from me because I love this man who is condemned to die with your approval!”

Marry! 'Twas strange that they did not hear the shouting of my heart, the gladness that was crying in my soul. I turned my gaze to the Chief. Mystification was writ on his face, and his hand went to his chin.

“ 'Tis most strange,” he said. “ Why have you delayed this call? ”

“ Because I learned of all this but a few hours ago. We closed our house and went to Princeton on the day following the escape. I was there yesterday when you left for Trenton. Last night I learned from the village folk that a man was to be shot for assisting in that escape. I questioned, they knew not the name, but said 'twas he who was found at the Langford home by the watch.”

“ And you love the yokel? ”

“ Yokel! Captain Ian Lester a yokel? The great Washington can be insulting, I learn.”

'Fore God, she was more glorious in her indignation than in her pleading. Her chin had gone up in that old way, and if a woman's eyes could kill, the Continental army would that instant have lost its commander. I saw a surprised look flash across the Chief's face. Then he walked to the window, and the side view I had of his face showed me a quiet smile on his lips. Could he have seen my face — but he could not. 'Twas plain he was enjoying her error.

"And so you ordered your coach and came to worry me." His back was towards her, and the smile still lingered.

"My *coach*! Think you I could have consent to come? I crept through a window at the dead of night, stole a horse from the stable, and came here to see the man they told me was stern but just. I came to beg for a life."

Then he turned and looked at her, and I, kneeling there by that curtain, held out my arms unseen to her.

"And if I do not grant it?"

She stood mute for a moment, one hand slowly going towards him. Then she sank into a chair and a sob was in her voice as she spoke, very low:

"Then I die at the same moment with him!"

Stepping forward, he laid one hand kindly on her head.

"Keep the tears from your eyes, child — Lester shall live."

In truth, I never could clearly recall the scene that followed, for the joy I saw flaming in her face put chaos into my brain, but I remember the Chief's closing words:

"Come to me in an hour and you shall have the paper. And I will give you an escort to Philadelphia that you may bear the message yourself."

She was gone. I flung aside the curtain and rushed into the room.

"You heard?" asked Washington, smiling.

"Yes, yes! Blessed God, I heard!"

He looked at me a moment, and no smile was on his lips.

"Was it she for whom you forgot duty?" he asked.

"It was."

He sat down at a desk and wrote rapidly for a few moments. Then he arose and handed me a paper.

"And she has caused me to forget it, also," he said. "You are to be her escort to Phila-

delphia. That paper is the only wedding-present I can give to you now."

I glanced at it and read the order countermanding the death-sentence of the soldier in prison.

The rain had ceased when I walked out of the house, and a rosy glow was in the east, marking the spot where the sun would soon rise. Birdland had awakened, and from the trees came the piping of the morning songs. My horse still stood where I had left him, and I turned away to walk, walk, walk, and join with the birds and the thousand things of nature in praise to God.

I found my steps leading me to the Delaware, towards the spot where Erasmus slept. Just beyond that clump of trees it lay, and I wondered if the faithful old black could look back across the dark river that morning and see the joy in his Marse Ian's heart.

The whinny of a horse came to me, and I then saw the grave, and at the green mound a girl was kneeling.

My heart pounded and things danced before my eyes a little unsteadily. . . . Then I came to myself and found that I was holding Gayle Langford in my arms. I know not what words had been said before that. Neither do I care.



"We must plant flowers here," I said, at last.

"Yes," she replied, softly, "for he 'took keer o' her boy!' Shall it be roses — red roses?"

There was a moment when my lips won hers. The sun peeped over the horizon at us; the scent of blossoms came on the morning air, and the chorus from the songsters in the trees swelled stronger, sweeter. Near by Gayle's horse was pawing impatiently. I slipped the bridle-rein over my arm, and then, hand in hand, we walked away into the glory of the new day.

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